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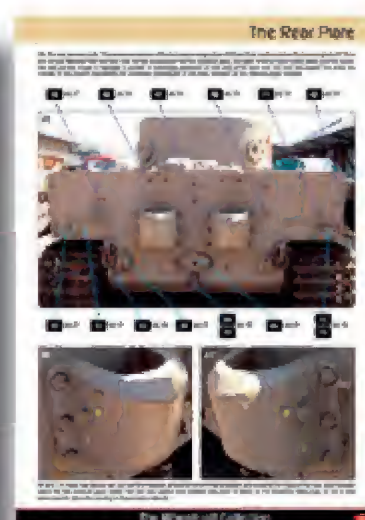
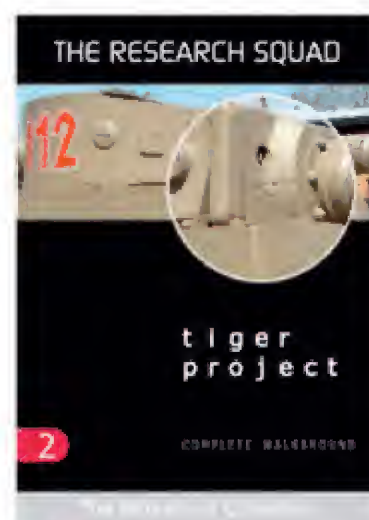
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# Readers' Letters

MI readers are invited to write to the Editor. Letters should be addressed to: Tim Newark, Military Illustrated, 3 Barton Buildings, off Queen Square, Bath BA1 2JR. E-mail: [timn@fsmail.net](mailto:timn@fsmail.net)

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**Cover: Roman auxiliary warriors, early 1st century. Painting by Graham Sumner.**

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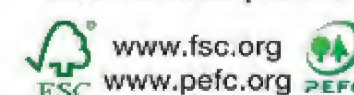
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## Western Isles Warriors



I do not know if MI readers are aware of the abusive article published recently in the Scottish Daily Express, accusing the Western Islanders of being Nazi supporters during WW2. This is really below the belt and has distressed many island families whose kith and kin made the supreme sacrifice in WW2. What is more galling is that 1,700

islanders were conscripted even before the outbreak of war to be used as professional seamen in the Royal Navy. It does not

matter how many apologies the newspaper may proffer the damage has been done because it is the initial damaging headline that registers with readers.

I enclose an image of the 'Rawalpindi' in 1939. The action made headlines around the globe. Twelve of the naval gunners were

ex-fishermen from Lewis, eight were killed and four became German prisoners. I find it ridiculous that 12 of the gunners on this ship came from one sparsely populated island, when one considers the huge population of our urban areas. The Commander of the 'Rawalpindi' was Captain Edward Kennedy, the father of Ludovic Kennedy, the late broadcaster and author. Captain Kennedy did not receive the Victoria Cross because he was not popular with the top brass of the Admiralty. The Western Isles sustained the highest casualty rate in the world wars for any area of the British Empire (34).

*Donald MacLeod, Aberdeen*

## DVDs for Christmas

### The Scarlet Pimpernel

Running time: 660 minutes  
RRP: £15.99

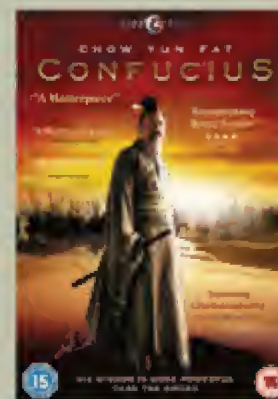
For the first time ever, the complete BBC series 1 & 2 of Scarlet Pimpernel are available on DVD. Richard E Grant as Scarlet Pimpernel, Elizabeth McGovern as Lady Marguerite Blakeney and Martin Shaw as Chauvelin star in this lush and riveting BBC adaptation of one of the classic adventure tales of all time set in Revolutionary France in 1793. Details of the Terror and campaign in La Vendee are particularly well recreated.



### Confucius

Running time: 119 minutes  
RRP: £17.99

From the acclaimed producer of Jet Li's 'Warlords' comes this epic story of the legendary Chinese philosopher. Chow Yun-Fat stars in a movie with lots of extraordinary scenes of ancient Chinese warfare set in 500 BC. When Kong Ze (Confucius), a commoner revered for his outstanding wisdom, is made Minister of Law in the ancient Kingdom of Lu, jealous aristocrats set out to destroy him.



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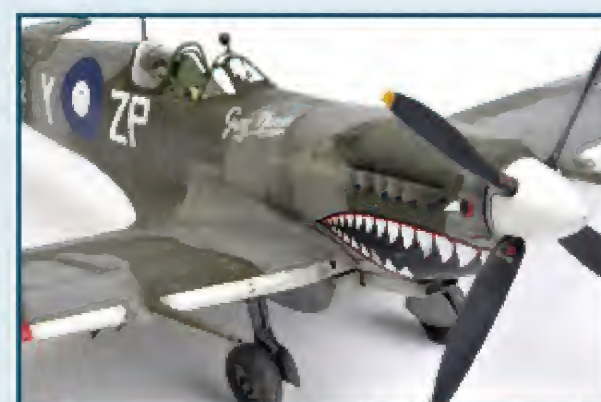
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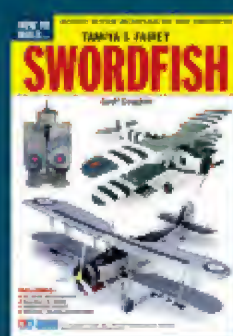
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Roman auxiliary warriors wearing mail armour under assault, early 1st century. Painting by Graham Sumner.



# CENTURION

## - HARD MEN OF ROME

In Roman military history, one soldier stands out for his crazy courage and his inability to admit defeat—the centurion. ROSS COWAN unveils the combination of madness and ferocity that made the Romans so successful in war.

**T**he traditional image of the Roman centurion is of a stern disciplinarian and a steady fighter. He is sometimes cited as the precursor of the modern professional infantry company commander. However, even a cursory inspection of the ancient literary sources reveals centurions as dangerously impetuous on the battlefield, leaving their posts to charge into the ranks of the enemy to win fame and glory. The conclusion of Jacques Harmand, the great French scholar of the Roman Army, was that centurions were often berserkers. One does not usually associate maddened warriors with the disciplined legions, but they are not hard to find. Let us consider centurions like Pullo, Vorenus and Scaeva.

### Berserk rage

Scaeva earned his immortality, courtesy of the stylus of his commander Julius Caesar, and of other Roman writers, in 48 BC. Defending one of Caesar's earth and timber forts at Dyrrhachium, Scaeva held his ground when his century fled in the face of determined assault by the legionaries of Caesar's rival, Pompey the Great. Initially holding the gate, and then fighting on the slope of the rampart, Scaeva's helmet was shattered by repeated blows and the jagged metal cut his brow; an arrow blinded him in the left eye and his face was awash with blood. He was wounded in all his limbs by a hail of javelins and arrows and his shield was pierced 120 times.

Yet Scaeva turned on his opponents, crushing one man's skull with a rock and cutting the hand off another with

his sword. In fact, he forced his way into the ranks of the enemy legionaries, hacking and stabbing with berserk rage. His opponents fell back, content to let him collapse from loss of blood. Having fallen to his knees, Scaeva called weakly to the Pompeians, apparently surrendering himself, but when two legionaries came forward to lift him from the ground Scaeva suddenly stabbed one in the throat and, as the second soldier panicked, Scaeva reared up and hacked off his arm at the shoulder. Only then did some of Scaeva's legionaries, who had paused in their flight to watch his defiant stand, come forward to aid their centurion. The Pompeians did not attack but stood in awed dismay as Scaeva was carried from the field and the gate of the fort was again barred.

Surprisingly, Scaeva did not succumb to his many wounds. Caesar was so greatly impressed with Scaeva's courage that he rewarded him with 200,000 sesterces (an ordinary legionary received a mere 900 sesterces as his annual salary) and promoted him to the elite ranks of the *primi ordines*, the senior centurions of the first cohort of the legion. Scaeva later appears as the commander of his own cavalry unit, the *ala Scaevae*, and in 41 BC he was serving under Octavian, Caesar's successor, as the *primus pilus* (chief centurion) of the Twelfth Legion. By this time his renown was such that when legionaries of the Twelfth made moulds for their lead sling bullets, they inscribed them not with the name of the legion's commander, but with the name of Scaeva.

### Pullo and Vorenus

Writing a century before Scaeva made his name at Dyrrhachium, Polybius noted that the Romans selected as centurions 'natural leaders... men who will hold their ground when worsted



Centurion in action on the Portonaccio Battle Sarcophagus, AD 190. The centurion is distinguished by wearing his scabbard on the left; common soldiers wore their swords on the right. After the mounted general, representing the intended occupant of the sarcophagus, the centurion is the most conspicuous figure in the battle scene. (Author)

and hard-pressed and be ready to die at their posts.' Polybius also wrote that the Romans did not want their centurions to be dare devils, 'they do not desire





**Minucius Lorarius, centurion of the legio Martia, 'legion of Mars'. Raised by Julius Caesar, it won the battle of Forum Gallorum for his successor, Octavian, in 43 BC but was lost at sea in the following year. (Steven DP Richardson)**

them so much to be men who will initiate attacks and open the battle.' This, however, was the ideal, and, it may be as a Greek officer, Polybius did not fully understand what the Romans required of their centurions in combat. Caesar's centurions certainly revelled in initiating action.

Titus Pullo and Lucius Vorenus are now well-known from the television series 'Rome'. In the series, Pullo is a mere legionary under the command of Vorenus, when in fact he was a senior centurion of the first cohort, but the makers of 'Rome' got it right in portraying Pullo as a wild warrior. In the winter of 54/3 BC, the legion of Pullo and Vorenus was besieged in its camp by the Nervii, the foremost of Gaul's warrior tribes. The Nervii were the kind of opponents the Romans loved—greater glory was attained by fighting such valiant men. However, for Titus Pullo, it was not enough to simply

defend the ramparts. He had to take the fight to the enemy, and he dared Vorenus, his great rival, to follow him.

Caesar wrote an account of what followed. He introduces Pullo and Vorenus as always quarrelling and fiercely competing each year for the senior centurial posts in the legions. During one of the Nervii's assaults, Pullo called to Vorenus: 'Why hesitate, Vorenus? What chance of proving your bravery are you waiting for? This day will decide our contest.' Pullo then jumped over the rampart and charged at the Gauls! Vorenus could not allow Pullo to get away with such a feat of bravado. Following him may have meant certain death, but honour and reputation were more important to centurions, and so Vorenus left the defences to charge into the stunned Nervian warriors.

Caesar tells us that 'at close range, Pullo threw his pilum [a heavy javelin] at the enemy, skewering one Gaul who had run forward from the multitude.' The demented Pullo was soon 'knocked senseless and the enemy sought to cover him with their shields [to box him in] and they all threw their missiles at him, giving him no chance of retreat. Pullo's shield was pierced and a javelin was lodged in his belt. Vorenus, his rival, ran to him and helped him out of trouble. Vorenus fought with his gladius at close-quarters, killing one and drove the others back a little. But he pressed on too eagerly and fell into a hollow. He was surrounded in turn, but Pullo came to his aid. They killed several men and retired to the ramparts with the utmost glory.'

Despite their bravery, surely censure and punishment must have followed? Had not these men abandoned their posts and left their centuries without commanders to indulge in reckless bravado? Yes, but legionary centuries were organised to look after themselves and to the Roman mind what Pullo and Vorenus did was virtue-enhancing, glorious and inspirational. Moreover, despite their fierce rivalry, the centurions demonstrated the triumph of comradeship, each saving the other. Caesar concludes that 'it was impossible to decide which should be considered the braver man.'

Vorenus disappears from history after this episode, but in the subsequent Civil War, an officer called Titus Puleio is found fighting for Pompey at Dyrrhachium. It is thought that Puleio is a manuscript error for Pullo. The ambitious soldier may have deserted, but it seems more likely that he was among

those transferred to Pompey's army prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 49 BC.

### **Heaviest casualties**

The survival of Scaeva and Pullo and Vorenus is remarkable. The primus pilus Sextius Baculus is another notable example. He collapses from his injuries at the battle of the Sabis in 57 BC, but reappears as the valiant defender of Octodurus in the following year. Leading a sortie through the gates of the town, Baculus and his legionaries broke through the Gallic besiegers and then turned to surround them—the Gauls were slaughtered.

Baculus makes one more heroic appearance in the pages of Caesar's Gallic War. When the Germanic Sugambri attacked the starving Roman garrison at Aduatuca (53 BC), Baculus was ill and had not eaten for five days. When the cohort on guard duty was about to break, he emerged from his tent and took the situation in hand at the point of greatest danger. Caesar reports that Baculus 'took weapons from the nearest men and stationed himself in the gate. He was followed by all the centurions of the cohort on guard, and together for a short time they bore the brunt of the battle. Sextius collapsed after receiving several severe wounds and with difficulty he was dragged to safety. In the respite thus given the common soldiers found the strength to venture back to their posts on the defences.' Like Scaeva at Dyrrhachium, he is an inspiration and his heroic example rallies frightened legionaries. It is to be regretted that Caesar does not reveal if Baculus survived to fight another day.

Centurions suffered the heaviest casualties in the Roman army. In theory, one centurion should have died for every 80 legionaries (the standard complement of a century), but leading from the front, often fighting unsupported and covering retreats meant that their casualty rates could be incredibly disproportionate.

At the Sabis, the desperate battle where Baculus 'could no longer stand upright' on account of his many wounds, the Nervii succeeded in killing almost all of the centurions of Caesar's Twelfth Legion. At Gergovia, Caesar suffered his only defeat in the Gallic War. It was caused by an unsanctioned attack led by centurions, and 700 legionaries were killed (52 BC). The centurions atoned for leading their men to disaster by covering the retreat—46 were killed, one centurion for every 15 legionaries.

At Pharsalus, Caesar's tactics were so

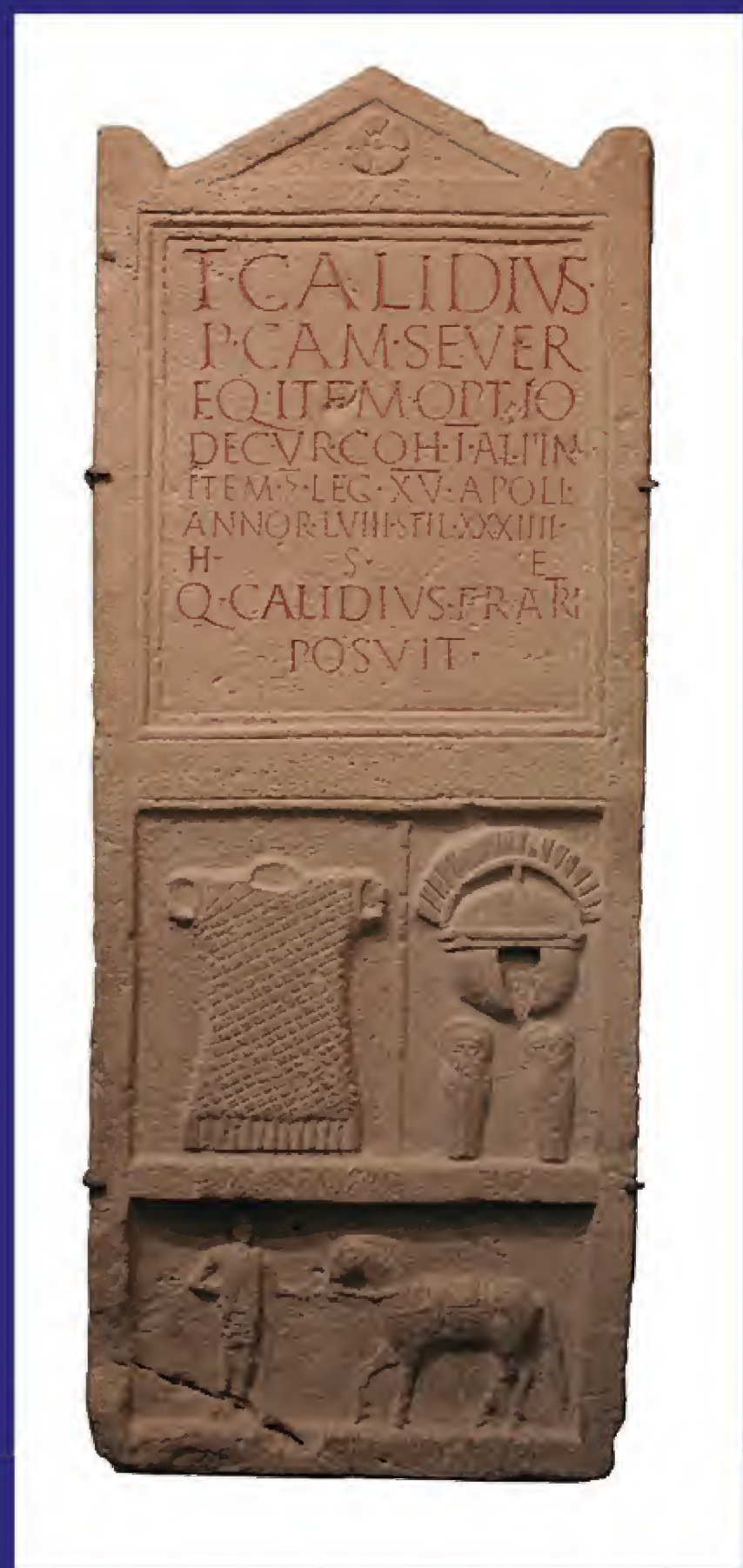


successful that he inflicted thousands of casualties on Pompey's army and lost only 200 of his legionaries. However, 30 of his centurions were killed, including Crastinus who opened the battle by leading a forlorn hope of 120 volunteers in a mad charge against the left wing of Pompey's army. The front ranks of Pompey's legions were composed of picked veterans called *evocati*. Crastinus, formerly the *primus pilus* of Caesar's favourite Tenth Legion, succeeded in breaking through them and was deep in the Pompeian ranks when he took a

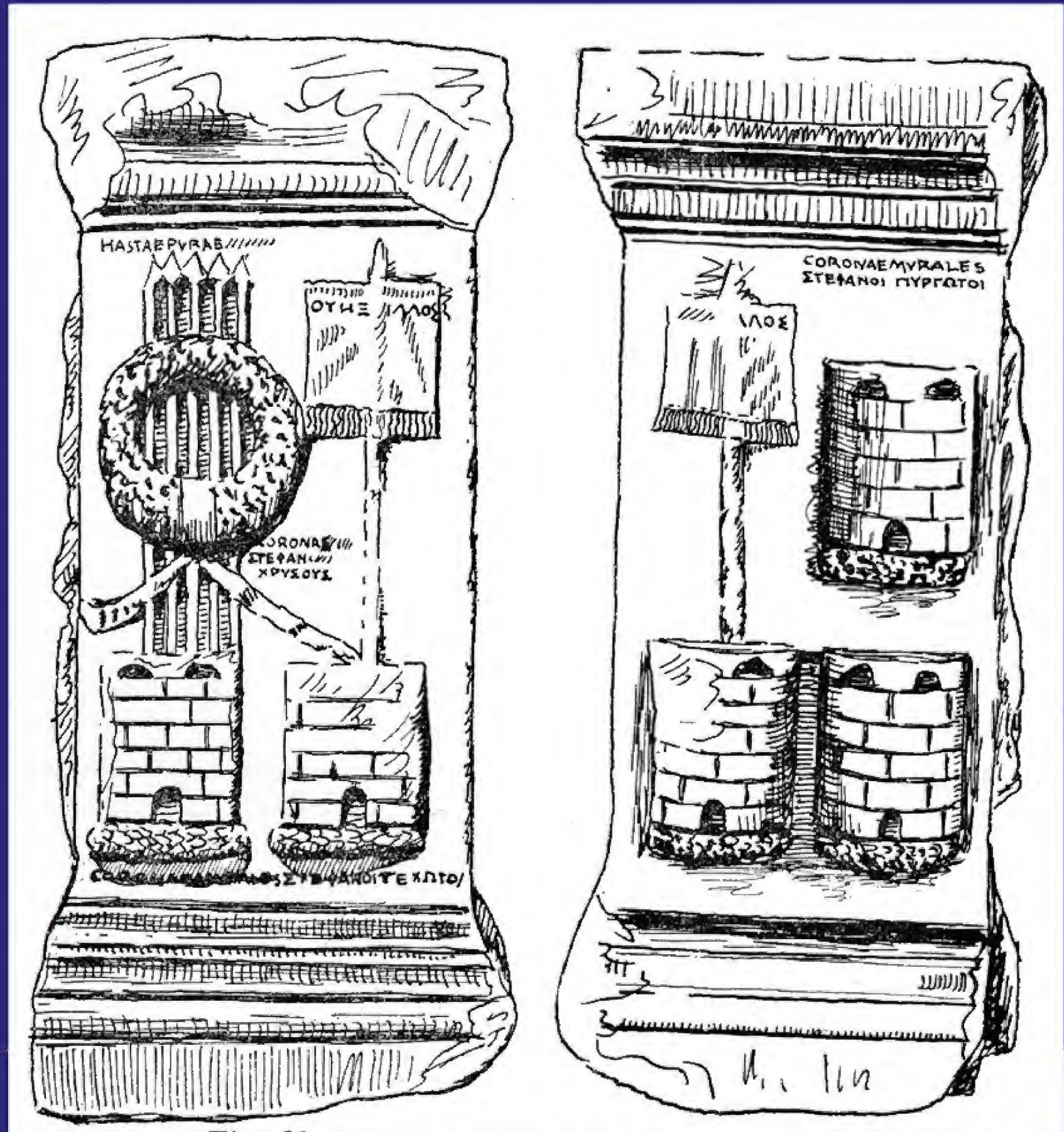
the works of his continuators, have ensured that the deeds of his centurions are the best known. Baculus, Pullo, Vorenus, Scaeva and Crastinus will always dominate any discussion of Roman centurions, but what about their precursors?

In 63 BC, the patrician Sergius Catilina rebelled against the Roman state and raised a small army. At its core were *evocati* and centurions who had fought for the dictator Sulla (Catiline was one of Sulla's lieutenants). Early in 62 BC, Catiline's army was cornered

Pontus. In 47 BC, Caesar famously routed the army of Pharnaces and sent a laconic report to the Senate in Rome: 'Veni, vidi, vici.' Twenty years before, however, Zela witnessed the rout of a Roman army by Mithridates VI of Pontus, the father of Pharnaces. Seven thousand legionaries and half of the army's centurions were slaughtered. Some of Mithridates' troops were equipped in Roman fashion, and this allowed one of the Romans to infiltrate the king's retinue during the pursuit. Appian relates that 'a certain centurion,



Gravestone of Titus Calidius summarises his career. He entered the army aged 19 as a cavalryman, won promotion to *optio* and then to *decurio*, commander of a squadron. This was his springboard to the centurionate in the Fifth Legion. He died after 34 years' service. Note Calidius' helmet with the transverse crest, the symbol of the centurion until the end of the 1st century AD. (Matthias Kabel)



Military decorations on the monument dedicated to the centurion Vibius Gallus. Left, two rampart crowns and, right, three wall crowns, indicating that Gallus was the first man over the defences in the assaults on five enemy fortifications. His other decorations are five silver spears, a gold crown and two banners. (Author)

sword thrust full in the mouth—perhaps Crastinus was bellowing his battle cry. The Pompeian legionary delivered the blow with such force that the point of the blade emerged out the back of Crastinus' neck.

### Roman rebels

Caesar's Gallic War and Civil War, and

near Pistoria by government legions and a praetorian cohort, but the Sullan veterans fought furiously. They refused to retreat and were killed to a man, all with their wounds to the front. This greatly impressed the Roman public. These men were rebels, but the Romans appreciated a glorious death.

There were two battles at Zela in

who was riding with Mithridates in the guise of an attendant, gave him a severe wound with a sword in the thigh, as he could not expect to pierce his back through his corselet. Those who were near immediately cut the centurion to pieces.'

At the siege of Athens in 86 BC, the first Roman to gain the wall was the



Recreated Roman standard-bearer  
wearing animal skin cloak.





centurion Marcus Ateius. Plutarch records 'in his Memoirs [unfortunately lost], Sulla himself tells us how Ateius did not give way, but stayed put and held his ground when his sword broke as he brought it down on the helmet of an enemy soldier.' That Caesarian centurions of the succeeding generation acted in a similar manner is unsurprising. They were the sons of Sullan veterans.

In the winter of 102/1 BC, Gnaeus Petreius, was *primus pilus* of a legion trapped by the Cimbri in the Adige river valley (northern Italy). Petreius' commanding officer panicked and refused to attack the Germans. Petreius slew the officer, assumed command and led a successful break out. Despite murdering (or at least summarily executing) the legion's commander, Petreius was awarded the grass crown by his general, Gaius Marius.

The grass crown was Rome's highest military decoration. It was awarded to the man who had saved an army from destruction in the field or who had raised a siege. It was woven from grasses gathered from the place where the army had been extricated. Gnaeus was the lowest-ranking soldier to win this crown – the usual recipients were generals, and he was probably the father of Marcus Petreius, the man who defeated Catilina's stubborn centurions at Pistoria.

### Super-human feats

What of the centurion after the death of Caesar in 44 BC? Once again, the evidence is limited, but the ancient literary sources throw up some interesting examples. The Romans expected their centurions to perform super-human feats in battle, but they were merely men. Sometimes the pressure got to them. We hear of a *primus pilus* called Vibillius who, in 38 BC, panicked and fled from a battlefield in Spain. The Romans did recognise combat stress to some extent, but in a society geared for war there was little sympathy for it. Vibillius was executed by *fusturarium* – beaten to death by legionaries armed with *fustis*-clubs.

Just before the battle of Actium commenced (31 BC), a centurion approached Marc Antony on his flagship. The veteran asked his imperator (commander), 'Why do you despair of these scars of mine and my sword and put your hopes in miserable planks of wood? Give us land, for that is where we conquer our enemies or die.' But Antony was determined to fight at sea,

and he lost. Later, Antony was intrigued by a centurion called Mevius. One of Octavian's centurions, Mevius had been captured during the Actium campaign in an ambush and was transported to Egypt. Antony interrogated Mevius and was impressed by his spirit. Mevius would not abandon Octavian and he expected execution, but Antony considered that a man of such 'virtus' should be allowed to live.

Two years after the Actium campaign, Marcus Licinius Crassus, the last of the Republican generals and grandson of the famous triumvir killed at Carrhae, conquered Moesia (Serbia and Bulgaria). Crassus was no slouch in battle, but he had a secret weapon—a centurion called Cornidius. This man went into combat not with the centurion's transverse crest attached to his helmet, but a pan of hot coals. According to Florus, 'the coals were fanned by the movement of his body, and he scattered flames from his head and had the appearance of being on fire.' Florus labelled Cornidius as 'a man of barbarous stupidity', but his bizarre headgear was certainly effective in an age of superstition—he terrified the enemy.

We do not know what became of

the centurion who harangued Antony at Actium, but it is notable that he could do so. While Mevius is a classic example of the indomitable spirit of the centurion, the unnamed officer of Antony demonstrates how the valour of centurions gave them access and influence that went far beyond the constraints of their (usually) low social class. Finally, Cornidius of the flaming helmet demonstrates that in the post-Caesarian era, the centurion continued to provide the factor on which battles hinged.

In 27 BC, Octavian reinvented himself as Augustus and became the first emperor of Rome. He then embarked on the greatest period of Roman conquest. Centurions were at the forefront, of course. The literary sources for the campaigns of Augustus, Agrippa and their lieutenants are unfortunately limited, but funerary monuments provide information about the men who pushed the frontiers of the empire to the Danube and temporarily beyond the Rhine.

We know of Statius Marrax, ultimately *primus pilus* of the Thirteenth Twin Legion, and the winner of five gold crowns, indicating



Maximius Gaetulicus was probably promoted to his first centurionate in the Twentieth Legion during the reconquest of southern Scotland c AD 139. This victory monument from the Antonine Wall, constructed immediately after the conquest, shows British warriors being trampled by a legionary horseman. One of the warriors has been decapitated. (Author)



five separate acts of high valour. Most famous of all is Marcus Caelius. His cenotaph was erected after his death in the Varian disaster of AD 9. A hard looking character, Caelius is depicted on the monument in his finery and grasping his vitis, the vine stick symbolic of the centurion. He is adorned with military decorations, most notably a civic crown of oak leaves, awarded for saving the life of a fellow-soldier in battle. The inscription tells us that he died aged 53. He had probably spent 30 years or more in the army. He was in the *primi ordines* of the Eighteenth Legion. It can be supposed that he died hard.

### Ignored pain

Centurions make relatively frequent appearances in the histories and poems of the 1st century AD. We hear of men like the *primus pilus* Julius Vestalis who led the recapture of Aegisos from the Getae in AD 12. Ovid, exiled from Augustus' court in Rome to the Danube delta and finding himself rubbing shoulders with tough military men, describes how Vestalis, in armour bristling with arrows and a battered scutum (the classic legionary body shield), ignored his wounds and continued to advance, clambering over the bodies of the warriors he killed. 'It is difficult to recount all your warlike actions, how many you killed or how they died.' Ovid declares that Vestalis' bravery inspired his legionaries and, like their centurion, they ignored the pain of their wounds to inflict worse punishment on the Getae.

Vestalis was a centurion in the grand tradition of Scaeva and Baculus, and men of his ilk must have continued to characterise the centurionate of the Imperial Legions, but most of our evidence for centurions in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD comes from inscriptions on gravestones, dedications to the gods and honorific monuments.

The monument erected to honour Vibius Gallus bears an inscription summarising his impressive centurial career, and is decorated with carvings of his military decorations. He was a *trecenarius*, a man who had served as centurion in the Vigiles (Rome's militarised fire brigade and night watch), the Urban Cohorts (Rome's military police), and the Praetorian Guard. He also served as a legionary *primus pilus* and, finally, as camp prefect of the Thirteenth Twin Legion, effectively second in command to the legate. Among the many decorations depicted



Part of a memorial to a centurion of the later 2nd or early 3rd centuries AD. Note his vitis, the vine stick carried by all centurions and the eagle-hilted sword, perhaps a gift from an emperor. Such gifts were replacing traditional military decorations like crowns. (IKAI)

are a gold crown, three wall crowns and two rampart crowns.

The rampart crown was awarded to the first to breach the defences of an enemy camp, and the walled crown to the first man who scaled the walls of an enemy fortress. A Dacian warrior is also carved on Gallus' monument, strongly suggesting that some of the crowns were won during the storming of forts and camps in the Dacian Wars of the emperor Trajan (AD 101-102 and 105-106).

### Old warriors

Shortly after AD 217, the townsfolk of Saturnia in central Italy honoured local benefactor Didius Saturninus with a monument. The inscription reveals that he had attained the rank of *primus pilus* and was decorated for valour by four emperors. Saturninus was first

decorated with torques and armlets by the emperor Lucius Verus in the course of the Parthian War of AD 162-166. Marcus Aurelius presented a second set of torques and armlets to him during the German Wars of AD 168-180. His final set of decorations was granted jointly by the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla. The latter emperor is identified in the inscription by his official name 'the Great Antoninus' and is also described as *divine*, indicating that the monument was inscribed after his murder in April AD 217—his assassin was a disgruntled praetorian *evocatus* denied promotion to centurion.

Severus and Caracalla decorated Saturninus with a gold crown and a silver spear, awards appropriate to the rank of centurion, and also a civic crown. All citizen soldiers were eligible for this latter





**Monument to Marcus Caelius, a senior centurion killed in the Varian Disaster, AD 9. He is adorned with military decorations, most notably the civic crown. The busts to either side commemorate his freedmen (former slaves), killed with him in Germany. (Agnete)**

award, a simple crown of woven oak twigs, but it was the most prized because it identified a hero who had saved the life of a *commilito* (fellow-soldier) in battle. Relatively few men were awarded this crown, suggesting that only the most exceptional feats of rescue in the face of the enemy were honoured. We know from other inscriptions in Rome that Saturninus held centurionates in the Praetorian Guard during the reigns of Severus and Caracalla. It may be that he won the civic crown at the battle of Lugdunum, when Severus unwittingly led his Praetorians into a trap set by his rival, Clodius Albinus (AD 197).

Saturninus served for 40 or 50 years. There seems to have been no fixed retirement age for centurions. Petronius Fortunatus served as a centurion in 13 legions and had a career spanning 50

years. We know this from a monument commissioned by Fortunatus when he was 80 to celebrate his accomplishments and to commemorate his son (also a centurion). Most interestingly, Fortunatus tells us that after four years in the First Italian Legion and having progressed through the 'NCO' ranks of *librarius* (clerk), *tesserarius* (officer of the watchword), *optio* (centurion's deputy) and *signifer* (standard-bearer), he was 'made centurion by vote of the legion'. This would have had to be ratified by the emperor – he always had the final say! – but Fortunatus must have done something exceptional to be honoured in this way by the legion.

As a centurion, Fortunatus was decorated in a Parthian War with a wall crown and a rampart crown. It has been suggested that these awards belong to

the latter stage of Fortunatus' career under the Severus and Caracalla. Severus campaigns against the Parthians in AD 194-195 and 197-198 culminated in the capture of Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital. Caracalla made a destructive incursion into Parthian territory in AD 216 and destroyed some fortresses. Fortunatus – 'the fortunate' – could have won his decorations in any of these wars. His advancing years would not have excused him from combat.

The emperor Maximinus was in his early sixties when he fought in hand-to-hand combat with German and Sarmatian warriors. He entered the army as a common trooper and probably served as a *centurio exercitator* (training centurion) of the Imperial Horse Guard. His proximity to the Severan emperors ensured his further promotion to the highest military ranks, and it was as prefect of recruits that he seized power in AD 235. The historian Herodian, who fairly despised this upstart emperor, was nonetheless impressed by the old warrior's continuing prowess in combat. Maximinus was not afraid of spurring away from his guardsmen and engaging the enemy unsupported.

It is from another inscription that we know of a vow fulfilled by Lucius Maximus Gaetulicus. In AD 127, as a new *tiro* (recruit) of the Twentieth Valiant and Victorious Legion in Britain, he vowed to achieve the exalted rank of *primus pilus*. He did it, but it took 57 years! Thus, in AD 184 as *primus pilus* of the First Italian Legion in Moesia, he set up a thanks monument to the Sacred Gods of the Pantheon, as promised in his decades-old vow. Gaetulicus also included his thanks to Commodus, the emperor who had finally promoted him.

Gaetulicus' career is one of the longest known in the Roman army. The rank of *primus pilus* could be held for one year only. A younger man could anticipate promotion to commands of the cohorts in Rome (*vigiles*, Urban Cohorts and Praetorian Guard), prefecture of a legion and perhaps ultimately govern a small province. A few even became Praetorian Prefect, the second most powerful man in the empire, but Gaetulicus was perhaps considered too old for further promotion. His total of 58 years of service is matched by Retonius Lucius, who also crowned his career with the *primipilate*. The centurion Aelius Silvanus appears not to have been promoted into the *primi ordines*, but he holds the record for the longest service in the Roman army—61 years. He died aged 86, a real senior centurion •





Defiant looking captured teenage SS-Panzergrenadiers. Hitlerjugend along with the 9th SS and 10th SS deployed youngsters such as these. What they lacked in experience they made up for with fanaticism.

# HITLER'S TEENAGE SOLDIERS

An increasingly desperate Hitler turned to his teenage Nazi supporters for soldiers. ANTHONY TUCKER-JONES tells the story of how Waffen-SS 18-year-olds fought a bloody and stubborn battle with the Allies in Normandy.

**'A** chain of Spitfires attacks the last section of the 15th Company. Missiles and cannon reap a devilish harvest. The section is passing through a narrow pass; it is impossible to get away,' recalled Colonel Kurt Meyer commander of SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 25 on 6 June 1944. 'An elderly French woman is coming towards us screaming, "Murder,

Murder!" An infantryman lies in the street. A stream of blood comes out of his throat – his artery has been shot through. He dies in our arms. The munitions of an amphibious vehicle explodes into the air – high tongues of flame shoot up. The vehicle explodes into pieces.'

Meyer's parent division, the 12th SS Hitlerjugend or Nazi 'Hitler Youth', had been alerted almost as soon as the Allied landing craft hit the Normandy beaches

that day. However, SS-Panzer Regiment 12 under Lieutenant-Colonel Max Wünche did not receive its orders until just before midday at 1130 with the 1st Battalion assembling in Le Neubourg and driving through Thibouville and Bernay to Orbec. Wünche had 91 combat ready Panzer IVs along with 62 Panthers at the beginning of June; a further 13 Panthers were despatched to the division on the 7th.

Allied fighter-bombers raining down



death and destruction soon forced the panzers to seek shelter amongst the trees. Panthers of Wünche's 3rd Company withdrew to Chateau De Launcy near Orbec and that evening his combat units rumbled through St Pierre-sur-Dives past the town of Falaise, over the Orne river near Thury-Hercourt and concealed themselves in a defile at Maizet. It has been estimated that the 12th SS arrived in Normandy with some 17,000 men. They would gain the respect and loathing in equal measure of the Allies for their tough fighting skills.

### Like a ghost

On the night of 6/7 June 1944, Hitlerjugend's commander Fritz Witt reached the HQ of the decimated 716th Infantry Division. It took him eight hours to reach them; a good four of which had been spent grovelling in roadside ditches avoiding the air attacks that sought to paralyse German troop movements. Shortly after, Kurt Meyer arrived and grasping the situation proposed a counter-attack on the left flank of 21st Panzer. His SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 25, part of Kampfgruppe Meyer/Wünsche, struck the Canadians north of Caen the following day, supported by 50 of Wünche's Panzer IVs under by Major Karl-Heinz Prinz. The Canadians were pushing on the vital Carpiquet airfield west of Caen when they ran into an ambush and were driven from Authie and Buron north-west of the city.

The German counter-attack was timed for 1600, but four Panzer IVs ran into Sherman tanks along the Franqueville-Authie road. Three of the panzers were knocked out and it was impossible to wait. Wünsche gave the order for two companies to advance left of the Ardennes Abbey, with one of them claiming ten enemy tanks for the loss of five Panzer IVs.

Lance Corporal Hans Fenn was almost killed in this battle: 'Ours the fifth panzer, took a direct hit between the side of the hull and the turret... The shell ripped a leg off my commander, Sergeant Esser. As I heard later, he managed to get out of the turret. The incendiary shell immediately set fire to all parts of the tank. I lost consciousness. ...Somehow, I managed, without being fully conscious, to crawl over the hatch of the loader. I could only remember clearly the moment when I dropped headfirst out of the hatch to the ground. With bad, third-degree burns, I walked back toward our advancing grenadiers. They looked at me as if I were a ghost.'

Hitlerjugend's attack was soon broken up by Canadian artillery, naval gunfire and air strikes followed by a determined British counter-attack. That evening the exhausted Kampfgruppe of panzergrenadiers and panzers held defensive positions stretching from the railroad line Caen-Luc sur Mer to Rue Nationale 13 from Caen to Bayeux. Although the Canadians had forced their way through the Carpiquet defences, the 12th SS had stopped them in their tracks destroying a total of 27 tanks for the loss of 14 Panzer IVs. Over the next few days, the Canadians striking from the Caen-Bayeux railway near Bretteville again fought the Hitlerjugend's tanks.

On the 8th, Panzergruppe West's commander General Geyr von Schweppenburg arrived at Meyer's HQ and unnerved him slightly by saying: 'My dear Herr Meyer, the war can only be won by political means.' However, that day the 12th SS, 21st Panzer and Panzer Lehr were thrown into a massed counterattack. Hitlerjugend in particular threw themselves with gusto at the British and Canadians. The later were thrown back for two miles, but their line did not break. The Allies then tried to force the Germans from Caen, but the only place that the 12th SS gave ground was at Cambes on 9 June. The Allies would learn to fear these tough and to some fanatical Nazi teenagers.

### Hitler Youth

The idea of forming a Hitler Youth division was originally raised with Hitler by General Gottlob Berger in early 1943. His plan envisaged drafting all of Nazi Hitler Youth members born in 1926 and assigning them to a combat formation. Hitler liked this proposal and immediately ordered Berger to commence organizing a division and his official order was issued on 10 February 1943. Berger nominated himself to be the first divisional commander, but Hitler's right-hand man Heinrich Himmler gave the job to a former Hitler Youth member Colonel Fritz Witt instead, as he had experience commanding one of the 1st SS Panzer Division's panzergrenadier regiments.

At the same time, the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions were also raised from conscripts, many of them from the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD or Reich Labour Service). Like the Hitlerjugend they were mostly just teenagers—according to Himmler the average age of the recruits was 18 years old. On 1 May, the first batch of 8,000 Hitlerjugend reported for six weeks training although they only received four. At the beginning of July, the graduating class were released for active service, while a second batch of 8,000 were inducted for training. By 1 September 1943, 16,000 trained recruits were available to form the Hitlerjugend division and were assembled at an SS training facility located at Beverloo, near



The Sturmgeschütz or StuG III assault gun fought with all the panzer divisions in Normandy. This particular one is being examined by members of the US 3rd Armored Division.





**French villagers get a closer look at an abandoned Tiger, such panzers fought in support of the 12th SS. Fortunately for the Allies the Tiger was few in numbers in Normandy.**

Leopoldsbouge in Belgium.

In March 1944, C-in-C West Field Marshal von Rundstedt and I SS Panzer Corps commander General Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich visited the division. During this highly publicized and stage managed event, the two generals were introduced to the division's officers. On 20 April 1944, Witt was promoted to the rank of Brigadier and the following month celebrated his 36th birthday. Well-wishers and officers from all over the division attended the celebration at the divisional headquarters in Tilières-Sur-Avre castle, Belgium.

Back in Normandy in June 1944, the 12th SS found Carpiquet airfield deserted by the Luftwaffe and unoccupied by the Canadians. They now turned on the Canadian 7th Brigade, part of the Canadian 3rd Division, driving it from Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse and Putot-en-Bessin, though the Canadians in turn recaptured Putot, claiming six Panthers.

Meyer supported by Panthers struck toward Bretteville from three directions without success. The attack from the south resulted in the platoon commander's tank being immobilised in the town and surrounded. The

attack from the south-west was ordered to rescue him, but the lead tank was knocked out and the rest driven off. In the attack from the west, three Panthers were hit simultaneously by well-concealed Canadian anti-tank guns, two managed to withdraw, but the other burned like a torch though its crew managed to bale out. The following morning the attack was broken off.

During the withdrawal, Wünsche was wounded, as Lieutenant Chemnitz records: 'The Panzers were returning from the attack. Since the road ran on top of an embankment, the Panzers had to be directed in order to get onto it. Initially, the commander of the Panzer Regiment, Max Wünsche, did this himself until I took over from him. One of the tanks had turned around on the road. I stood in front of it directing the driver. Wünsche stood behind me to the right. The orderly officer of SS-Panzer Regiment 12, second lieutenant Nehrlich, stood behind me to the left. At that moment, the Panther took a shell hit from a Canadian tank to the front armour. Wünsche was wounded in the head by a fragment. I took a shower of small fragments from my head to the knees. Nehrlich was so critically

wounded by a fragment that, although he was immediately put into the sidecar of a motorcycle to be driven to the dressing station, he bled to death during the drive.'

The stark reality of the battle for Normandy soon came home to Emil Werner, serving with Meyer: 'Until Cambes, everything went well. So far as we were concerned, the village looked fine. But on the outskirts we came under infantry fire and then all hell broke loose. We stormed a church where snipers had taken up positions. Here I saw the first dead man from our company; it was Grenadier Ruehl from the headquarters platoon. I turned his body over myself – he'd been shot through the head. He was the second member of our company to die. Dead comrades already; and we still hadn't seen any Englishmen. Then the situation became critical. My section commander was wounded in the arm and had to go to the rear. Grenadier Grosse from Hamburg leapt past me towards a clump of bushes with his sub-machine gun at the ready, screaming "Hands up! Hands up!" Two Englishmen emerged with their hands held high. As far as I know, Grosse got the Iron Cross, second-class, for this.'





GI examines the shattered remains of a Marder III self-propelled anti-tank gun that belonged to the 352nd Infantry Division.

### Teenage Tiger

The British and Canadians were dismayed at the Hitlerjugend's apparent fanaticism, not realising that they could expect little else from youngsters raised under the harsh dictates of National Socialism. Sergeant Leo Garipey of the 3rd Canadian Division saw no reason for leniency toward these Nazi teenagers: 'The morale of the men was very low indeed. So many of their long-time comrades had stayed behind on the battlefield, the battle itself had been so savage, so furious, that every man felt that the 12th SS Panzer had a personal grudge against our tanks. Silently, grimly, we were looking at each other, knowing exactly what was in the other man's mind... Mostly, everyone was rather vindictive, and silently swearing revenge.'

Colonel HS Gillies, King's Own Scottish Borderers could not forget the hot reception meted out by the 12th SS at Cambes: 'The attack entailed crossing a distance of about one thousand yards of open cornfield, which fell away from Cambes Wood. We had barely crossed the start-line when the enemy reacted fiercely, with well-sited machine gun and intense mortar fire, which enfiladed the

companies as they moved forward...

After a sharp battle at close quarters, the village was cleared at dusk. They had now been identified as the notorious 12th SS (Hitler Youth) Panzer Division.'

The battle for Hill 112 was an equally brutal affair. Private Zimmer experienced firsthand the British attempts to dislodge them on 10 June. 'From 6.30 to 8.00am, again heavy machine-gun fire. Then Tommy attacks with great masses of infantry and many tanks,' recalled Zimmer. 'We fight as long as possible but we realise we are in a losing position. By the time the survivors try to pull back, we realise that we are surrounded.'

It seemed that the British Operation Epsom, designed to punch west of Caen on 25 June, could not fail. Directly in its path was the 12th SS, holding the line from Fontenay-le-Pesnil through St Marvieu and Cheux eastwards to Carpiquet airfield. It fell to Wünche's panzer regiment and SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 25 to resist the British, while just to the west of Caen, Meyer was facing the Canadians.

Second Lieutenant Stuart Hills, with the Nottinghamshire Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry, 8th Armoured Brigade,

was a fresh faced 21-year-old who had only been with his unit since January, having arrived straight from the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Sandhurst. He remembered his role in Epsom, especially the very stiff reception from the Hitlerjugend. 'The fighting in Fontenay was fierce and confused, with enemy tanks of 12th SS Panzer dug in defensively east of the town, and we did not have enough infantry to take the village. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, the attack had clearly run out of steam, infantry losses had been heavy and we withdrew to the heights of Point 102 above Fontenay to replenish our stocks of ammunition, refuel and have something to eat.'

The attack though was renewed and Fontenay captured and the road to Caen cut. When 8th Brigade moved forward to attack Rauray, Hills discovered he was in for a nasty surprise. 'As we cleared Fontenay, we were suddenly confronted by an enormous tank coming round the bend in front. It was hard to know who was more surprised, but John [Semken the Squadron Leader] shrieked, "Fire, it's a Hun." And they loosed off about ten rounds into the smoke. As this cleared away, it was observed that the crew were baling out as small flames came from inside the tank. It was a Tiger of 12th SS Panzer, the first Tiger to be captured in Normandy, and made an impressive sight at close quarters as both its size and the thickness of its armour became apparent.'

Between Tessel Wood and Rauray, ten Tiger tanks were dug in and the SS-Panzer Regiment 26 repulsed the British attack through Le Manoir from Tessel towards Rauray and established positions near Le Haut du Bosc, facing toward Cheux. Assembling across the line Fontenay-Tessel-Bretteville to attack toward Juvigny, the Heavy Tank Company's actions left SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 26, which lay directly in the path of the British attack unsupported. The latter was thrown into a counter-attack at 0500 on the 26th.'

### Air attacks

Hubert Meyer, Hitlerjugend's Operations Staff Officer, expecting an armoured attack, tried to get the move order rescinded but I SS Panzer Corps would not comply. The results were predictable. 'At 0700 on 26 June, this great British attack of about 600 tanks across a three mile front rolled over the Pioneers and the Panzer Grenadiers,' says Meyer. 'Eventually it came to a halt only





**American pilots examine their handiwork on 19 July 1944—knocked out PzKpfw V better known as the Panther. SS-Panzer Regiment 12 started the battle for Normandy with 157 Panthers and Panzer Mk IVs.**



**SS-Panzer Grenadiers from the 1st SS lay strewn round their camouflaged SdKfz 251 armoured personnel carrier.**

because our artillery fire separated the enemy infantry from their tanks. Several pockets of resistance did considerable damage.' On the 28th, a hastily formed Hitlerjugend Kampfgruppe supported by 21st Panzer, which had been redirected from the British airborne bridgehead, attacked along the railway embankment toward Mouen. The young panzergrenadiers broke through and drove the British back.

With the British pouring out of the Odon bridgehead, a Luftwaffe motorised Flak unit with 88mm dual use flak guns, which had been protecting the 12th SS workshops was rushed forward. Its job was to relieve a battalion of 12th SS on Hill 112. What they found was half a company of exhausted teenagers who had fought hard to fend off encroaching British tanks the previous day. The Luftwaffe's guns were soon engaging British armour coming through the village of Esquay to the south-west, but the following day British tanks and air attacks drove them from the hill. The British then withdrew from Hill 112 on the night of 29/30 June, not because of the dogged resistance by 12th SS, but the arrival of II Panzer Corps with the 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions, which had come into the line.

The Germans succeeded in containing Epsom but at a cost of over 2,600 casualties sustained by Hitlerjugend. The offensive cost the British 4,020 casualties; the 11th Armoured Division alone lost 100 tanks and suffered 1,000 casualties during 26-29 June. Although Epsom's attack toward Evrecy south of Caen against Hitlerjugend's was a tactical failure, the Orne was crossed, Hill 112 taken and a deep salient driven into the

enemy defences west of Caen.

Like so many of the panzer divisions, the 9th SS suffered from continual air strikes during its move to the Normandy battlefield and did not arrive until 28 June almost three weeks after the Allied invasion commenced. The II SS Panzer Corps was ordered to strike the British corridor from the south-west. The 9th SS was to attack towards le Valtru and the Cheux bottleneck, supported by 2nd SS and Panzer Lehr, while the 10th SS would assault the Odon bridgehead and Hill 112. Elements of the 1st SS, 12th SS and 21st Panzer Divisions were also to be involved in attacking the other flank of the exposed corridor.

This counter-attack was scheduled for 29 June at 0700 with the 9th SS on the left of the Odon, but attacks by the RAF delayed the preparations until 1430. In addition, in a stroke of bad luck, an officer from 9th SS, with the plans for the coming attack, was out early reconnoitring the routes to Cheux when he was captured. Walter Harzer, Chief Operations Staff Officer of the 9th SS observed: 'As it was, our counter-offensive broke down under air attack and artillery fire, particularly the heavy guns of the battleships. They were devastating. When one of those shells dropped near a Panther, the 56-ton tank was blown over on its side, just from the blast. It was these broadsides from the warships, more than the defensive fighting of the enemy's troops, which halted our division's Panzer Regiment.'

During the fighting against the Epsom salient, the 9th SS suffered heavily, losing 1,145 casualties and 32 tanks and assault guns. The latter accounted for 49 enemy tanks, while its Panzer IVs and Panthers

claimed another 13. Having endured such considerable losses, the division was pulled back into reserve in mid-July. Returning to the line, the 9th SS fought during the bitter battle for Hill 112 and helped beat off Operation Goodwood. Its sister division, the 10th SS was ordered back to France in mid-June and went into action against the British bridgehead over the Odon on the 29th along with the 9th SS. The following day they captured Point 112 beating off a series of British counter-attacks.

### **Heavy fire**

The commander of the 9th SS, Brigadier Sylvester Stadler, was proud of his division's combat performance especially in the face of the Allied artillery: 'In the course of the forenoon the enemy, in turn, resumed his attacks and managed to take Eterville once again, whereas his attacks on height 112 were repelled with considerable losses. A counter-attack launched immediately on Eterville succeeded and, by noon, the village was again in our hands. An extremely heavy and fluctuating battle ensued afterwards for the ruins of Eterville, which place changed hands repeatedly until, finally, it was firmly in our possession late in the evening of 4 July 1944.

'The losses suffered during these engagements in the rocky terrain offering almost no cover, were considerable (Grenadiers about 10 per cent), and mainly caused by the excessively strong artillery fire, which could be countered by next to nothing from our side, since only some 700 rounds of ammunition were available for the entire attack on 4 July. Nevertheless, the panzer battalion operating near Eterville managed to





**A StuG assault gun belonging to the 17th SS Panzergründler Division, which was knocked out in the Carentan area fighting the Americans.**

destroy 12-14 enemy vehicles, whereas they lost only two tanks.'

By early July, the SS holding Carpiquet airfield were expecting an attack by the Canadians. The garrison consisted of just 150 Hitlerjugend teenagers drawn from Meyer's command; about 100 were on the airfield and the rest in the village of Carpiquet itself supported by a few tanks and an 88mm gun. The attack was launched at 0500 on 4 July and the Canadians cleared Carpiquet village and then ran into the panzers and the 88mm. Hitlerjugend counter-attacked the following day.

On 6 July, the SS-panzergrenadiers deployed to the northern suburbs of Caen. Within two days, they and a regiment from the 16th Luftwaffe Field Division were ejected by a British frontal assault on the city known as Operation Charnwood. At La Bièvre, the 12th SS were well entrenched and it took two attempts before it was firmly in British hands, who were then

brought to a halt before Malan. At the village of Buron, north-west of Caen, elements of SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 25's 3rd battalion were surrounded and on the verge of being overrun by Canadian tanks.

Kurt Meyer and General Eberbach, Panzergruppe West's commander, were at the Ardennes monastery. Meyer witnessed the dramatically unfolding events: 'The tank company of von Ribbentrop with its 15 Panthers deployed against this mass of enemy tanks and they shot up the enemy armour, halting its advance. The last enemy tank was destroyed only 100 metres west of Ardenne, but von Ribbentrop had saved the command post. His initial instructions had been to relieve the panzergrenadiers and clear the Canadians from Buron, however he was distracted by the Canadian armour to the left of the village and had to send a platoon of Panthers to deal with them. Reaching Buron, von Ribbentrop's Panthers knocked out several Canadian tanks.'

Loathe to enter the village without infantry support, von Ribbentrop quickly found the tables turning, as he noted: 'Just then a well-camouflaged Canadian anti-tank gun must have opened fire, because two or three tanks to my right went up in flames one after another. There was nothing left to do but pull back to our starting position and support the hard pressed infantry from there. The company's remaining tanks spent the rest of the day under heavy artillery fire around the monastery. Several engagements with enemy armour took place, which prevented the enemy from advancing any further and enabled the monastery to be held until it had to be abandoned soon afterwards.'

Sergeant Freiberg, serving with Ribbentrop, found himself in one of the three knocked out Panthers: 'The crew in the turret bailed out at once, and because of the heavy machinegun fire, took cover behind the Panther. My radio operator and driver had not bailed out, and were



calmly sitting in the tank, whose engine was still running. I therefore jumped back up onto the tank and grasped the throat microphone, which was dangling over the side of the turret. I called to my driver: "Back up!"

### Shocked soldiers

Although the Hitlerjugend could not retain Caen, they had, along with Panzer Lehr, denied it to the Allies for just over a month of bitter fighting. By 9 July, the division had lost 51 Panzer IVs and 32 Panthers. Three days later, they received a welcome respite from the bloodletting when they were relieved by the 272nd Infantry Division and sent to Potigny, 20 miles north of Falaise to recuperate.

At the time of Operation Goodwood on the 18th, the 12th SS was resting in reserve, except for a strong Kampfgruppe under Max Wünsche, which Hitler ordered to the coast at the Orne estuary to counter a spurious invasion threat. With the onset of Goodwood, Hitlerjugend was summoned back into the firing line and remained in the Caen area, fighting along the Caen-Falaise road.

On 1 August, the inexperienced Canadian 4th and Polish 1st Armoured Divisions arrived in Normandy, eager to join the battle. Just six days later, following the launch of Operation Totalize to take Falaise, these two divisions were tasked to breach the

German second defence line between St Sylvain and Bretteville, but they were to run into successive defensive lines held by the 12th SS and two German infantry divisions, forming I SS Panzer Corps. These formidable defences included 60 hulled down panzers, self-propelled guns and 90 88mm anti-tank guns.

Kurt Meyer drove cross-country to Cintheaux to rally Kampfgruppe Waldmüller in an attempt to halt Totalize on 8 August. The significance of Falaise dawned on him: 'Suddenly, I realise that the fate of the city of Falaise and the safety of both [5th Panzer and 7th] armies depend on my decision. I am standing up in the VW as we drive in the direction of Caen. More and more shocked soldiers come toward me and flee to the south. In vain, I attempt to halt the front, which is in motion. The terrible bomb attacks have broken the nerves of the units of the 89th Infantry Division... I jump out of the car and stand alone on the road armed with a carbine... The boys probably consider me crazy, but then recognise me, turn around, wave their comrades over and organize the defence of the height of Cintheaux. The town has to be held at all costs to gain time for the two Kampfgruppen.'

Meyer gave both the Canadians and Poles a very bloody nose. Panthers of the 12th SS and Tigers of the Battalion 101 held the Canadians at Bretteville

and Cintheaux, while the Poles were countered at St Sylvain, losing 30 tanks trying to barge the 12th SS out of the way. On the 9th, Wünsche's Panthers and troops from the 85th Infantry Division, the latter only recently arrived in Normandy, counter-attacked the Canadians holding Point 140. In the bitter battle, the Canadians were driven off with the loss of 47 tanks, miraculously SS-Panzer Regiment 12 lost none.

By the end of 10 August, Meyer had just 15 Panzer IVs, five Panthers and 15 Tigers facing 700 enemy tanks. In the area defended by the 12th SS alone, over 100 tanks had been destroyed in the fierce close quarter combat. By now, the American breakout from Avranches was well underway and with the US 1st and 3rd Armies charging westward, Totalize became Operation Tractable, intended to close the neck of the developing Falaise salient, trapping the German armies in Normandy. Hitlerjugend SS became instrumental in preventing this happening.

### Stopped in their tracks

Meyer and Wünsche knew that the key strategic ground north-west of Falaise was around Point 159. The Canadians drove from Soignolles to Potigny and Sassy, while at Perrières and Jort the last few panzers were quickly put out of action. On the 15th, Point 159 was heavily



A Panzergrenadier half-track burns after an air-strike. The 12th SS moving to the front suffered regular air attack.





**Shermans of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade finally entered Caen on 10 July 1944. Although the Hitlerjugend lost the city with Panzer Lehr they denied it to the Allies for just over a month of bitter fighting.**

bombarded and then assaulted by Allied tanks—they were halted in their tracks. Major Karl-Heinz Prinz was killed, while to the right of the hill RAF Typhoons set about the panzers. The pressure was such that only a few of their tanks were able to cling to the reverse slopes and in the afternoon were forced to abandon their positions.

The 10th SS launched a counter-attack against the American penetration north of Barenton on 10 August and made some ground although they could not reach the town itself. Heavy losses soon forced the division over to the defensive. Instead of being committed to the renewed Avranches/Mortain counter-offensive, the division was pushed eastwards via Domfront and Fromental as the Germans pulled back to defend Argentan. Elements of the 10th SS along with the 1st SS and 2nd Panzer were trapped in the Falaise pocket.

In the face of Totalize, the 9th SS conducted a successful fighting withdrawal and avoided encirclement in the Falaise pocket, helping to keep the escape route open. Eventually, it was withdrawn for a refit near the Dutch city of Arnhem, having lost almost half of its manpower, where it was to take part in another famous battle.

Although the Canadians reached Falaise on 16 August, the 12th SS held out in the town until the 18th, four days after Tractable commenced. By now, the battle for Normandy was all but over. Between 6 June-22 August, Hitler's fanatical and resolutely fearless teenage Nazis had lost around 8,000 killed in action, wounded and missing. This seemed a deathblow from which no unit could hope to recover. Trapped in the Falaise salient was the cream of Hitler's tank forces, including elements of Hitlerjugend with just 20 panzers. By mid-August, along the northern shoulder of the pocket, were the 21st, 1st SS and 12th SS Panzer Divisions, fending off the encroaching British, Canadian and Polish forces.

Nonetheless, most of Hitlerjugend's combat troops and rear services were not encircled at Falaise, resulting in moderately low casualties during the latter half of August. Also, many of the missing who were not captured made their way back to the unit. For this reason, despite the disaster of Falaise, from 15-22 August the 12th SS lost less than 1,000 men, consisting of 45 killed, 248 wounded and 655 missing. It would soon rise from the ashes of Normandy ready to fight again •

### **Surrounded but not abandoned**

Officer-cadet Kurt Misch and his comrades of Hitlerjugend soon realised that after all their tough resistance against the Canadians and Poles, they were surrounded. Misch remembered the sense of apprehension: 'On the night of 15 August we were marching in an unknown direction. During the night we suddenly saw Vercy lights [flares] on three sides; we looked at each other knowingly – surrounded? Next day, we were sure. We tried to keep it from the men as long as possible. But they realised it as soon as the field kitchen did not turn up and the rations got smaller.

'Something new, unknown, takes possession of us. All the usual joking is silent. We are all inwardly preoccupied, wondering how to meet the situation, as individuals. If it does not mean death, being taken prisoner will mean a long separation from home. We "old" ones stick together. Our Chief leaves no doubts in our minds about the gravity of the situation, and I come back from the conference deep in thought. The Vercy lights hang like great signs in the heavens. The front lies beneath them in a breathless silence. Low-flying German planes drop rations, and a large container of chocolate lands near me. A nice surprise, and a greeting from the outside world. We have not yet been abandoned.'





# THE LAST CHARGE

On 8 November 1917, a few miles north-east of Gaza, in southern Palestine, the last, pure British cavalry charge was unleashed across the stark landscape. STUART HADAWAY reveals what happened when horse and sword were pitted against machine gun and artillery.

**O**n 31 October 1917, the British Army burst through the line between Gaza and Beersheba, along the southern border of Palestine. This would be the Third Battle of Gaza. The first two battles had been in March and April that year, at the end of the long British advance that had pushed the forces of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire back across the Sinai Desert and away from the strategically vital Suez Canal. The two previous attacks had ended in bloody failure, but in the summer of 1917 the situation had changed.

General Edmund 'Bull' Allenby was

sent out to Palestine to take charge of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF). With him came new troops, new technologies, new ideas and a new, invigorating spirit. Set against the slaughter of Passchendaele on the Western Front, the widespread mutinies among the French Armies, and the collapse of the Russian forces and government in the East, Allenby's next move suddenly took on a significance out of all proportion to its strategic value.

As the war dragged on towards its fifth year, with bad news flooding in from all around and no end in sight, Britain needed a victory. More than

that, it needed a symbol of hope. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd-George, sent Allenby one simple order: 'Present Jerusalem as a Christmas present to the British nation.'

## **Camouflaged camps**

To stand any chance of capturing Jerusalem, with all its religious, historical and symbolic importance, by the end of 1917, Allenby would need to act fast. His first problem was the significant and well-fortified Turkish positions at Gaza on the coast and Beersheba on the desert's edge, and the lines of trenches that ran between them. The coastal areas were





**The charge of the Warwickshire and Worcestershire Yeomanry at Huj, 8 November 1917, by Lady Butler. (By kind permission Trustees of the QOWH)**

heavy defended, while the further inland they went the more of a problem water became. The biggest wells in the area were at Beersheba, and any attack up the desert flank meant that these had to be taken on the first day of any offensive, or the assaulting troops would be forced to withdraw through thirst. With the help of his head of intelligence, Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, Allenby formed a plan.

Over the length of October, a careful campaign of deception and misinformation was carried out. Dummy camps were set up, and false orders allowed to fall into enemy hands. Everything pointed towards a military build up for another attack on Gaza.

In fact, troops were massed inland, where they poised themselves to attack Beersheba, utilising surprise to take the town rapidly. British, Australian and New Zealand infantry and cavalry were moved into carefully camouflaged camps, marching only by night, as close to the town as water supply would allow. Once the attack started, they would have just one day to take the town and its vital wells before men and horses began to drop through thirst.

On 31 October 1917, the offensive broke. With Turkish eyes firmly on Gaza, British, Australian and New Zealand troops poured out of the supposedly impassable desert to envelope Beersheba. The garrison desperately and bravely held out through the day, but the British were equally desperate. Failure to take the town and its wells by nightfall would bring the entire advance to a grinding halt before it could even begin. Finally, near dusk, the mounted troopers of the Australian Light Horse achieved the supposedly impossible by charging the walls and trenches that surrounded the town, breaking through and seizing the wells before they could be destroyed.

As news seeped through to the rest of the Turkish armies that their impregnable left flank had been turned, the whole line began to crumble. Although panic infected some units, many others fell back steadily and professionally, hoping to establish a defensive line further north. Allenby knew that it was imperative to keep pressure on the Turks. He had to hit them hard and fast wherever a line may be forming, to keep the pressure on and keep them rolling inexorably backwards. To achieve this, he let the cavalry loose.

The war in Palestine would see British and Dominion cavalry shine brighter than in any other campaign. The open rolling terrain was ideal for fast paced wars of manoeuvre. Fodder and water became less of a problem in Palestine proper, allowing them to roam far in advance of their supporting services. Perhaps the greatest of all advantages were the cavalrymen themselves. From Australia and New Zealand came tough, fearless riders whose fighting skills would become legendary the world over.

From Britain came a very different breed—the Yeomanry. Part of the Territorial Army, many even at this late stage in the war were still pre-war weekend warriors, mocked in peacetime

as toy soldiers, decorative but of no real use. However, many had seen service in the Boer War or the regular army, and by the end of 1917 most had fought their way across the beaches and through the gullies of Gallipoli, and over the burning sands of the Sinai. In the classic British military tradition, their amateur facade masked a deep and deadly efficient professionalism.

### **Relentless pressure**

One of the cavalry brigades sent forth by Allenby was the 5th Mounted Brigade, consisting of the Warwickshire Yeomanry, the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars (Yeomanry) and the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars (Yeomanry). All three were veterans of the Dardanelles, and had been involved in the toughest fighting of the Sinai campaigns. Spreading out to the north and east of Gaza, they kept a relentless pressure on the Turkish rearguards. The retreating enemy dug in on every ridge and hill, and so the Yeomanry would race in close, dismount and charge the last few yards with the bayonet. As each ridge was cleared, so the Turks would dig in on the next, and the process start over again.

For a week this pattern continued. By 8 November, the Brigade was tired, and under-strength as troops and squadrons were detached to investigate abandoned camps and to capture known supply dumps. At noon that day, the Gloucestershires had fallen far behind while watering their horses. All told, by 1.00pm, the two remaining cavalry regiments could muster just five troops apiece – 85 men in the Warwickshires, and 105 in the Worcestershires. The nearest support troops were the slower moving infantry of 60th (London) Division, some two miles away.

The much-reduced Brigade found themselves sheltering behind the southern tip of a low, banana-shaped ridge that gradually curved to the north-east. Ahead of them was another ridge, with a spur jutting out towards them about half way along its length. On this spur, four Austrian-crewed 75mm field guns were engaged in long-range fire against the advancing 60th Division. Behind them, and to the left as the Yeomanry saw them, four machine guns and some 2,000 Turkish infantry were in supporting positions. The ridge the Yeomanry were sheltering behind almost met the enemy-held ridge at its northern tip.

Something had to be done about the Turkish guns. The previous days had seen a myriad of similar situations, with





**Map of the Charge. (Graphics by David Buttery)**



**Recreation of a Yeoman in Palestine at the Museum of the Worcestershire Soldier. (Trustees of the QOWH)**



**Artefacts of Lt Jack Parsons MC, on display at the Museum of the Worcestershire Soldier. (Trustees of the QOWH)**

long-range Turkish fire causing casualties among the advancing troops, but pulling back to the next ridge as soon as the British became a threat. These guns, with their supporting troops, could keep this pattern up all day, unless action was taken quickly.

But, the question was, what should be done? A charge by 190 Yeomanry against a numerically superior enemy in such a strong position would be suicidal even without the machine guns and artillery. However, the lay of the land gave them an opportunity. The curving ridge, which was topped by several knolls, would give them shelter until they were in a flanking position. Even so, it could be a risky operation, and so the senior officer present, Colonel Williams of the Worcestershires, set out to the west where the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade were supposed to be.

If he could gain their aid, they may be able to make a simultaneous flanking attack from the other side, greatly increasing the chances of success. They may also have a machine-gun detachment to give suppressing fire; the 5th Mounted Brigade's detachments having fallen behind. However, moments after Williams struck off west, a staff car pulled up behind the waiting Yeomanry. Inside was General JS Shea, commanding officer of 60th Division, who also knew the pattern of rearguard actions had to be broken. He approached Colonel Hugh Gray-Cheape, commander of the Warwickshire Yeomanry and now senior officer present. Shea requested immediate action be taken to deal with the enemy guns.

Gray-Cheape gathered his men, arranging them in two lines. In front, was the Worcestershire Yeomanry, now commanded by Major Bill Wiggin, with 'A' Squadron under Major MC Albright, and two troops of 'C' Squadron under Lieutenant JW Edwards. Behind them, with enough of a gap left to allow them to steer around any fallen horses from the first wave, the Warwickshires formed up, with 'B' Squadron under Captain R Valentine, and two troops of 'C' Squadron under Captain JS Stafford.

The plan was to follow along the dead ground to the rear of their own ridge until it met the northern ridge, then sweep over and hit the guns from the flank, following on through to the machine guns and troops behind. The troopers from the signals sections, who carried pistols instead of swords, were ordered to fall out, but the order was unanimously ignored. Swords and pistols were drawn, and the advance ordered.

## Jaws of death

By the time the front rank reached the first of the knolls, that were scattered along the crest of their ridge, they had sped up to the trot. By now, they were kicking up dust, and the main enemy battery had adjusted their aim, lobbing shells at where the troopers were just visible as they passed the first knoll. At 1000 yards range, and against an obscured and moving target, these shells had minimum effect, with just one Yeoman unhorsed. Then, two closer, unseen batteries opened fire.

From their starting point, the Yeomanry had not been able to clearly see the other end of their own ridge. On the second knoll, where they had planned to turn for the final charge, a screen of Turkish infantry was fanned out along the crest, protecting four mountain guns. Further back, at a third knoll, three howitzers were positioned to lob shells over the second. With the main battery swivelled to face the Yeomanry too, the two lines of troopers now found themselves in a deadly crossfire.

Afterwards none of the survivors, even the senior officers, could remember any orders being given. What happened next seems to have been the spontaneous actions of a well-trained and highly experienced body of men. Faced with two new targets, and with no thought of retreat, the cavalry charge transformed into three charges.

Colonel Gray-Cheape peeled off with Capt Stafford and the two troops of 'C' Squadron of the Warwickshires, and swung to the right, aiming to charge around the flank of the mountain battery and assault the howitzers. Major Martin 'Toby' Albright spurred ahead with 'A' Squadron of the Worcestershires, aiming to charge over the second knoll and down onto the mountain battery. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Edwards and his two troops of Worcestershires and Captain Valentine with 'B' Squadron of the Warwickshires continued to charge the main battery. With a whirl of dust and a flash of steel, 190 men fanned out to do the impossible.

'A' Squadron of the Worcestershires had the least far to go and so hit the enemy line first. They charged 800 metres into the mountain battery, covering the ground so fast that they took few casualties until the last few paces, when a point-blank volley tore through their ranks. Troop commander Lieutenant Jack Parsons led his men straight at the guns, recording that 'the last gun to fire put out of action the right half of my troop completely.'

Trooper Harry 'Pat' Crombie, an





Tanks had been used during the 2nd Battle of Gaza, but poor training and planning had wasted them. Preparations would be much more thorough for the 3rd Battle. (Trustees of the QOWH)

Irishman a month short of his 20th birthday, remembered reaching the guns: 'When we came close we veered right then left, which left me fourth in a row straight for an Austrian gun; first was a sergeant then Dennis Hill then Jack Turner followed by myself. A shell exploded in the mouth of the gun temporarily blinding me, [and] when I could see [again] there was nothing between me and the gun, which was about six feet from me.

'Sitting under it was the gunner pointing a pistol at me, I punctured his neck with my sword and went on, following Sergeant Allen and followed by Dicky Dunn. When a shell burst overhead, my mare jumped and turned. Then I saw Dicky and his horse lying on the ground, Dicky's wrist was shattered by a piece of shrapnel and his horse's back was broken by another piece, there were some Turks with a machine gun beside us, they did not move, so I got Dicky onto my mare and headed back to where the survivors were gathered.'

### Roar of thunder

Around half of 'A' Squadron were killed or wounded, including the popular Major

Albright who had been caught by the enemy's final volley. Major Wiggin had been with them, and now took command of the 36 men who were still mounted and unscathed. They were coming under fire now from the howitzers, and needed to move positions. He could see that the rest of his regiment, still only half-way across the valley, were under heavy fire from the main battery. He formed 'A' Squadron and led them on to support their comrades and divide the enemy's fire.

In the valley, 'B' Squadron of the Warwickshires and 'C' Squadron of the Worcestershires had the hardest task. The valley they had to cross was 1,200-1,400 metres wide, with a dry wadi running through the centre. By now, Captain Valintine and the Warwickshires had managed to get ahead of Lt Edward's two troops of Worcestershires, who were to the right and a little behind.

Sergeant J Haydon was with Valintine's squadron: 'We came into [sight] of their guns which sounded like a roar of thunder, they seemed to have turned every gun they had into us at one moment. Men and horses were pitch-polling on either side of me, I expected my time was coming every second. The dust was so

thick we could not see the horse in front of us; some of the men galloped into a narrow deep waddie [sic]... I only missed it by a few yards, and I could hear the horses dropping into something.'

The last 100 metres of the slope towards the ridge was steep and difficult, so that any momentum the charge had gained would seep away. At least, on this slope, they would be sheltered from the enemy's guns, although now a skirmish line of Turkish infantry was spread along the crest. Once over that crest and through this screen, with momentum lost and horses blown, 200 metres of open ground lay between the struggling Yeomanry and the Austrian-made guns.

Captain Oskar Teichman was the Medical Officer of the Worcestershires, and had chosen to follow the main charge. He and his orderlies were about 100 metres behind the main body as they crossed the crest: 'The Worcester and Warwick Squadrons, already thinned out by casualties, swept on, and topping a rise, charged through the infantry screen and were lost from view. Suddenly the terrific din of shrieking and exploding shells ceased, and we knew that the end had come.'



'B' Squadron, Warwickshires, were the first to reach the main battery, followed moments later by the two troops of 'C' Squadron, Worcestershires. The enemy guns flared, and the lines seemed to disintegrate. Sergeant Haydon was in the first wave as it entered the killing zone of the last 200 metres: 'By this time our squadron only numbered 25 unhurt... I was shot, it caught me in the face, within 30 yards of the guns, I thought to myself I am only hit slightly as I could still see out of both eyes, but after a few minutes my left eye stopped up with blood. We were 10 or 12 [left] by now and carried on without a check.'

Lieutenant W Mercer charged with Valentine: 'A whole heap of men and horses went down 20 or 30 yards from the muzzles, the Squadron broke into a few scattered horsemen at the guns then seem to melt away completely; for a time I thought I was the only man alive.'

In fact, Mercer was the only officer to charge with either of those squadrons to survive unscathed; Valentine and Edwards were both killed. 'A' Squadron of the Worcestershires were only moments behind the main charge, and 50 metres short of the guns Major Wiggin was struck in the head by a shell fragment. Though dazed, he carried on into the guns, where his horse was shot from under him. Falling to the ground, Wiggin rolled under one of the guns but was stabbed by an enemy gunner. Only the violent intervention of one of the following Yeomanry saved the Major's life.

### Battered remains

The guns had stopped firing as the Yeomanry reached them, with their Turkish and Austrian crews either fleeing or taking shelter under the guns. However, charging through the guns only meant that the four machine guns and the 2000 infantrymen on top of the ridge could now get a clear shot at them, and more horses and men went down under their fire.

'I galloped round the guns like Lord Nelson with one eye blocked up,' recalled Sergeant Haydon. 'As we surrounded their guns there were Turks under each gun with all hands up, quite clear from the reach of my sword and all surrendered. I was then making for a bit of cover, and had only cantered about 30 yards from the guns when a machine-gun opened fire on me from the left rear, shooting my horse through the head and neck. As he dropped, he fell across my leg and foot, pinning me down.'

Despite having already made two



The three howitzers captured by Colonel Grey-Cheape. (Trustees of the QOWH)



General Edmund 'Bull' Allenby, one of the finest British generals of the First World War. (Trustees of the QOWH)





Working parties deal with the dead and wounded horse by the main battery. (Trustees of the QOWH)



Captured 75mm Krupps field gun and limber, main battery. (Trustees of the QOWH)



Heroes rest—the memorial raised over the mass grave of the Yeomanry who died at Huj. They were later reinterred in Gaza War Cemetery. (Trustees of the QOWH)

charges and taken heavy losses, 'A' Squadron of the Worcestershires was the only formation still in any semblance of order. Now under the command of Lt Jack Parsons, a handful of men on tired horses turned against two thousand infantry.

'As we flashed past the guns I put my sword into my left hand and drew my revolver and loosed six rounds into the crowd of Turks and Austrians crowded under the last gun in the line,' said Parson. 'We then headed for a crowd of resisting Turks and again charged them at sword point... At this point my horse – a dear creature called Brownie – was shot dead and landed me on my back in a crowd of Turks.

'I immediately stood up, sword in hand, and started to back away from the Turkish infantry when one of the Turks stopped and looked at me and slowly started to put his rifle to his shoulder to shoot me. We were only a few yards apart, this Turk and I, in a crowd of Turks. I instinctively grabbed my revolver and pointed it at the Turk who immediately dropped his rifle and put up his hands and joined his retreating friends. The whole point is that there was no bullets in the revolver.'

Even before the charge, the Turkish infantry had outnumbered the Yeomanry by more than ten-to-one. Now, the battered remains of the Yeomanry were effectively finished as a fighting force, and only a couple of dozen men were even standing. Even so, these mounted shock troops had done enough. The Turks, with morale shaky after defeat outside Gaza

and days of retreat, had now had their will to resist shattered. They had watched this tiny force of horsemen charge through a storm of shot and shell and, just, survive. They were in no mood to face these devils, and a general retreat began.

Slowly and steadily, more in resignation than panic, the Turkish forces fell back. By this time, 'A' Squadron of the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars (Yeomanry) consisted of Jack Parsons and Trooper J Williams. All others had been killed or wounded.

The Medical Officer, Teichman, now came up. With his two assistants he attempted to begin the sorting and treatment of the wounded. Coming over the ridge with his medical orderlies, they were faced with a terrible sight: 'In addition to the casualties which had already occurred in the valley, the ground was strewn with Yeomen and their horses, while under, on, and behind the guns the killed and wounded Yeomen, Austrian and Turk lay intermixed.'

The Brigade Field Ambulance was far behind, but Teichman could not wait for it: 'We commenced to dress the wounded at once, and found them scattered in all directions. Wounded Turks came crawling in, and one could not help contrasting their clean wounds, caused by our sword-thrusts, with the ghastly wounds sustained by our men from shell-fire and saw [edged] bayonet. Part of a Turko-German Field Ambulance, which had been unable to escape, was found in a hollow behind the batteries, and their equipment was invaluable to us, as our dressings soon ran out.'

### Most distressing thing

Gradually the Brigade began to pull themselves together. Loose detachments, who had seen or heard the fighting and rushed to catch-up, rejoined the Brigade. Parts of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars arrived, and their machine-gun section commandeered the captured enemy machine-guns, turning them on the retreating Turks to discourage any ideas of counter-attacking.

With the Gloucestershires was Lieutenant Robert Wilson: 'I am not particularly emotional but this was the most distressing thing I had ever seen.... The first man I saw was a friend of mine in the Worcester Yeomanry whose horse had been killed under him and who had been killed by a bayonet obviously before he had a chance to put up a fight. The next sad sight was of a sergeant in the Warwicks who I also knew; his horse was dead on its knees, wedged between





**Worcestershire Yeomanry on campaign in the Sinai Desert, 1916. (By kind permission Trustees of the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars (Yeomanry))**

the wheel and barrel of a heavy gun. The sergeant was dead in the saddle and the Austrian gunner was dead with the sergeant's sword through his chest and his own rifle still in his hands... The Turkish infantry was scuttling away, occasionally turning to fire a few rounds but our horses were still without water so any further pursuit was out of the question. We buried those splendid yeomen at dawn and, for the first time, realised the wicked waste of war.'

Of the 190 men who had taken part in

the charge, 36 were now dead, and 57 wounded. Three out of four Squadron commanders were killed at the head of their men. The Worcestershires had suffered by far the worse casualties: out of 105 officers and men, 19 were killed and 39 wounded – a casualty rate of 55%. The Warwickshires had suffered less overall: 17 killed and 18 wounded out of 85 – a rate of 41% casualties—but this was because Colonel Gray-Cheape's Squadron had suffered only two men wounded on their long flanking ride that had ended up capturing three howitzers. In all, 110 horses were killed or had to be destroyed.

Captain Teichman did his best to sort and treat the wounded, among them Major Bill Wiggin. This was the second time in as many years that Wiggin had ignored serious wounds in order to stay with his men in a desperate situation. He was recommended for the Victoria Cross, but instead received a bar to his Distinguished Service Order.

Meanwhile, the Yeomanry counted their gains as well as their losses. Eleven artillery pieces had been captured (four 75mm guns, four mountain guns, and three 5.9 howitzers), plus four machine guns, and about 80 Austrian gunners and

Turkish infantry. Roughly another 90 enemy troops had been killed. Horses were bought forward and the guns taken to the rear, while some of the oxen who had been used as teams for the guns became rations for the Yeomanry. Those Yeomanry who had been killed were gathered and buried in a common grave, where a memorial was later raised.

Meanwhile, the effects of the charge reverberated through the Turkish army. News of the charge spread back to the headquarters of the Turkish 8th Army in the village of Huj, only a mile away. Even though the Yeomanry were in no condition to exploit their success, the headquarters staff fled in panic. When the 60th Division entered the village some time later, they found extensive stores which the Turks had not thought they had time to destroy, while the abandoned headquarters contained invaluable code books which had been left behind in the rush to evacuate. As the headquarters panicked and fled, so did the surrounding troops, and, like ripples on a pond, the Turkish rearguard crumbled. The pattern of rearguard actions and retreats had indeed been broken, and what had been an orderly withdrawal now became an undisciplined rout.



**The main battery after the battle at Huj. (Trustees of the QOWH)**





Worcestershire Yeoman in southern Palestine. (Trustees of the QOWH)

### Swords into ploughshares

Two of the guns captured during the charge were presented to the Yeomanry: one to the Worcestershires, and one to the Warwickshires. Suitably marked, they were sent back through the supply lines to be shipped to England as trophies. Unfortunately along the way, the guns crossed the path of New Zealand troops who rather fancied some souvenirs of the war themselves.

Both guns disappeared, and it would only be in the 1990s that they were rediscovered as part of a war memorial in rural New Zealand. Negotiations secured the return of one of the guns, that which had been destined for the Worcestershire Yeomanry, and extensive restoration work was carried out by the Royal Artillery. It can now be seen, with other relics of the battle, at the Warwickshire Yeomanry Museum, in the Court House in Warwick.

There are other Huj artefacts in the Museum of the Worcestershire Soldier, in Worcester City Museum. Perhaps the most impressive of them are those in the collection of Lt Jack Parsons. He had served as a ranker in the Warwickshires

before being appointed to a commission, and was awarded the Military Cross for his role in the charge at Huj.

Later in the campaign, spending Christmas in the Judean Mountains overlooking Jerusalem, he had a religious epiphany, and at the end of the war joined the Church. During the Second World War, he served as an Army Chaplain, disobeying orders and smuggling himself to Italy to serve the front line troops. His medals and badges are on display, but of more immediate interest are the revolver he used, empty, to face down 2,000 Turkish infantry, and also two sword stubs. One is the remains of his own 1908 pattern cavalry sword, also used at Huj, and the other is the hilt of a Turkish sword picked up from a battlefield. The story behind these two swords, and why only the hilts remain, is an interesting one.

In 1946 Jack Parsons hung up his uniform once more and returned to his parish. For that year's Harvest Festival, he decided to do something a little different. Taking his inspiration from Micah, Chapter 4 Verse 3 ('and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks'), he took his

two souvenirs from Palestine to the local blacksmith, who did just as the Bible says. The blades were cut off and hammered into a ploughshare, also on display. He then borrowed some land from a local farmer, and used the ploughshare to sow some seeds. The wheat he grew was then used for his Communion bread.

The charge of the Yeomanry at Huj would be the last pure charge of the British Cavalry. Never again would cavalry charge without infantry or artillery support, and with every man mounted. A few days later the Buckinghamshire and Dorset Yeomanry made a charge at Mughar, but they had machine-gun and artillery support, and one squadron dismounted and made the final dash on foot. There were charges also in France in the last months of the war, but again these were all combined operations, and by the next war in 1939, the cavalry were mostly mechanised. Never again would British, horse-mounted cavalry make an unsupported charge with swords alone. After centuries of domination, the age of the cavalryman had passed. Never again would l'arme blanche prove the decisive factor, and turn the tide on the field of battle •



# The Fight for Algeria



American troops land on the shores of North Africa.

In 1942, the Allies needed control of French North Africa, but when they stormed ashore, would the Vichy French be friendly—or fight them? ÉRIC GRENIER discovers the grim truth.

**S**hortly after midnight on 8 November 1942, 100,000 American and British soldiers nervously stepped off of the transports that had brought them directly from the United Kingdom and the United States, and into waiting landing craft. Lights on shore blazed as the ships crept towards the beaches, each soldier unaware of whether he was going to be greeted by friend or by foe.

Controlled by Vichy France since 1940, French North Africa had been mostly kept out of the Second World War that was raging in Europe and in the deserts of

Libya and Egypt. It was to support that latter campaign, and open up possibilities of a landing in southern Europe, that brought the Allies to the three French colonies on the north-western corner of the African continent. But whose side was Vichy France on?

## Operation Torch

Vichy France was created out of the French defeat of June 1940, and controlled southern, unoccupied France as well as much of the overseas empire. Vichy France was neutral, and jealously guarded this status when the Allies attempted to take

over parts of Vichy's empire, notably at Dakar and in Syria. Now that the Allies were going to invade French North Africa, it was necessary for them to find a man that could bring the French back on their side.

Marshal Pétain, the aged veteran of the First World War and leader of Vichy France, was not that man. Neither was General Charles De Gaulle, leader of the Free French. Many of the officers in the French Army were still opposed to De Gaulle, and the Allies were more interested in bringing the Vichy French over to them rather than increasing De Gaulle's power base.

One man thought to be friendly to



the Allies was General Alphonse Juin, commander of French forces in North Africa, and the Allies got in touch with him. He was not a man of initiative, however. When Admiral François Darlan, commander of the French Army, came to visit Algiers to care for his sick son, Juin was unwilling to act without his superior's support.

In General Henri Giraud, the Allies believed they had their man. Giraud had been captured during the Battle of France in 1940, but had since escaped the Koenigstein prison. After crossing into Switzerland, he made it into Vichy France in April 1942. It was felt that Giraud could command the loyalty of the French, and so General Dwight Eisenhower brought him to his headquarters and offered him the role of head of government for French North Africa. Giraud had plans of his own, and demanded that he be made the commander of all Allied armies on French territory. Eisenhower, of course, refused and after a day Giraud came around to the American general's line of thinking.

While these last minute arrangements were being made with the French, the Allied convoy approached the North African shores.

Operation Torch, the invasion of French North Africa, involved landings in Morocco and Algeria. In all, the Allies had over 100,000 men, the vast majority of them Americans. It was thought that the Vichy French would welcome the Americans more readily as antipathy still existed between the French and the British. This was due to the latter's actions in the Middle East and for the destruction of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir following the French surrender to Nazi Germany. In revenge, the French had bombed Gibraltar on several occasions.

About 350 transports, escorted by 500 warships, carried the Allied Army to French North Africa. 'The route took the convoy out of range of German bombers,' wrote a war correspondent on the Allied convoy. 'Seasickness was a far greater worry to the troops than enemy attack. For two days fairly rough weather made many of them extremely unhappy.'

Algeria was the most important part of Vichy France's empire, and would be the base of Allied operations against Tunisia and the Afrika Korps. Two groups, the Central and Eastern Task Forces, were responsible for its invasion.

The Central Task Force was to land at Oran in western Algeria. Its forces included elements of the American 1st Armoured Division, the 1st Infantry Division, and the 82nd Airborne Division

under the command of General Lloyd Fredendall, and numbered about 37,000 Americans and 4,000 British. Supported by HMS Rodney and the aircraft carrier 'Furious', along with a plethora of smaller ships, the Central Task Force would land on either side of the port city before moving to capture it.

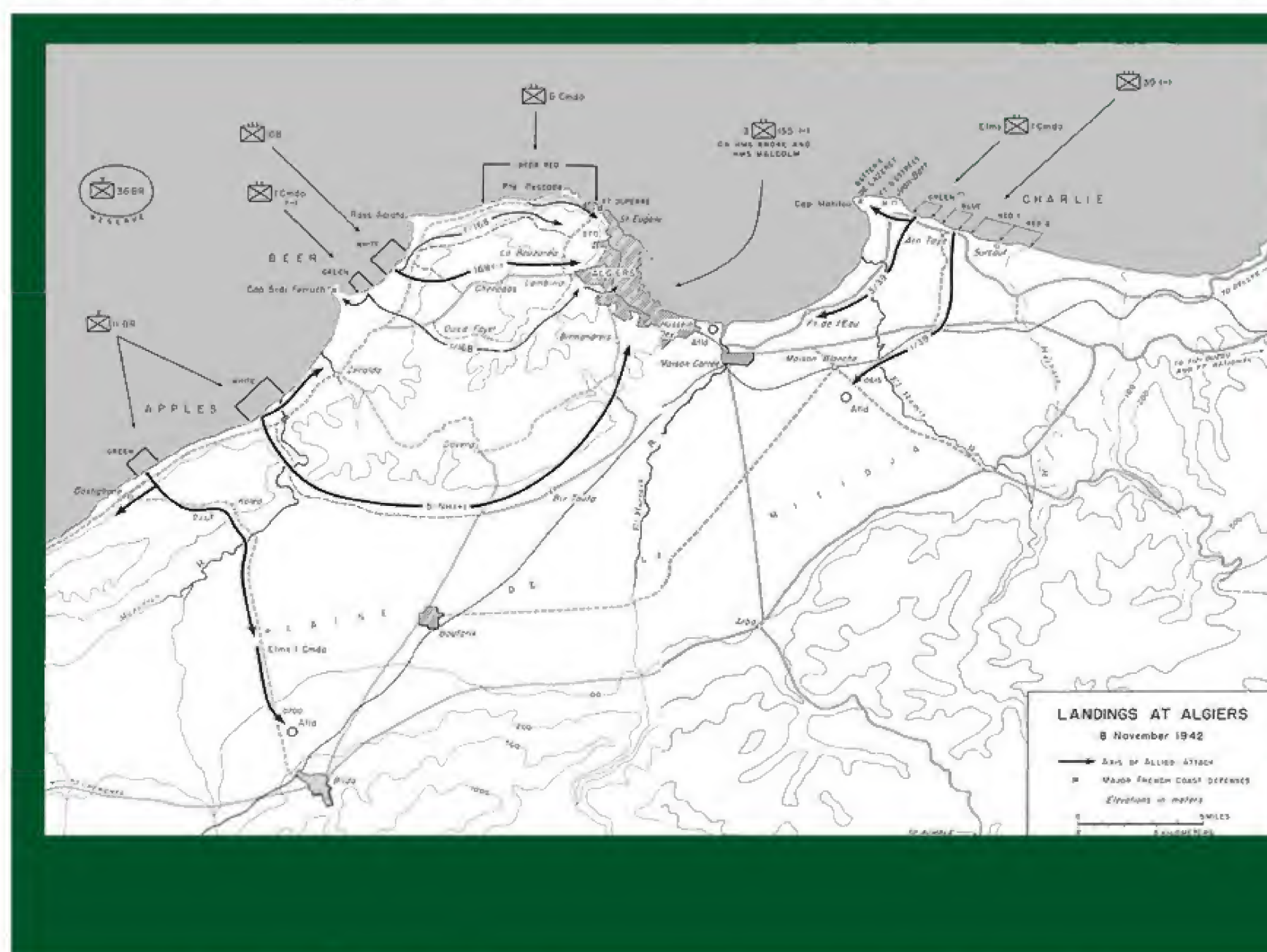
The Eastern Task Force had the more important mission of capturing Algiers, and was made up of the British 78th Infantry Division and the American 34th and 9th Infantry Divisions under the command of General Charles Ryder. As at Oran, the landing forces would disembark on either side of the city.

Arrayed against them was the army of Vichy France. Algeria was garrisoned by about 55,000 troops, supplemented by 110 old tanks and 60 armoured cars. The French Air Force had approximately 150

would have avoided pushing Vichy France into the arms of the Axis Powers.

Located on the western edge of a 12-mile wide bay, Algiers was the centre of government for all of French North Africa and its largest city. It was defended by a dozen powerful coastal batteries, while smaller guns ringed the bay. About 100 planes, half of them fighters, were based nearby and roughly 7,000 men defended the city itself. Another 4,500 were stationed west of it and 3,500 to the east. The garrison included six medium tanks and 60 light tanks, along with the some motorized artillery.

Allied landings began shortly after 0100 hours on 8 November, the initial wave consisting of two American regiments, two British brigades, and two battalions of British Commandos. The largest part of the Allied force landed west of the city



fighter aircraft in all of North Africa, but about half of them were Dewoitine D520s, the best French fighter aircraft of the war.

### French marines resist

During 5-6 November, the task forces slipped through the Gibraltar Strait. Up to this point, German intelligence had been convinced that the Allied armada was nothing but a supply convoy meant for the beleaguered island of Malta. Once they had passed the strait and their composition became better known, the Germans then considered their likely destination to be Tripoli, in General Erwin Rommel's rear. Only on 7 November did the Germans realize that the ships were headed to French North Africa, the destination they had considered least likely for an Allied invasion. It was thought that the Allies

with the remainder landing to the east.

There, at 0130, the 39th Combat Team (5,700 Americans) of the 9th Division landed near and to the east of Surcouf. The landings were completely unopposed and it was only an hour after the first men had hit the beaches that the coastal battery at Cap Matifou opened up. The British destroyers 'Cowdray' and 'Zetland' moved in and engaged the battery, silencing it in short order.

As they did so, the roughly 200 British and 100 American Commandos took control of most of Cap Matifou. Two batteries stubbornly resisted.

'French marines in the battery resisted stoutly, and the Commandos, without heavy automatic weapons fell back,' wrote a correspondent. 'British cruisers drew in about 1,000 yards. Fire from their





**General Henri Giraud while a prisoner of the Germans. He escaped captivity and eventually made his way into Allied hands.**



**The 'Housatonic', part of the Allied convoy to North Africa, from the perspective of the USS Ranger.**

guns hammered the battery for a half an hour... Relays of Hurricanes bombed the battery for another half hour, but the marines again checked the Commandos. Finally the colonel ordered up a company of 75s—ironically, guns invented by the French—to drive out the French marines. When the barrage lifted the Commandos stormed the fort.'

After under-going naval and air bombardment throughout the day, 50 French marines surrendered the Lazaret Battery. The second refused to capitulate,

and remained in French hands as night fell.

The regular forces quickly moved inland from Surcouf, with the 3rd Battalion of the 39th Combat Team reaching the small village of Fort de l'Eau on the Bay of Algiers, six miles west of the landing beaches. There, the French put up stiff resistance with the help of three tanks, which blew up several American trucks.

The 1st Battalion moved southwest from the beaches towards Maison Blanche and the airfield located nearby.

They crossed the ten miles and reached their objective a little after 0600. At that time, a few French tanks appeared over the horizon and fired a few shots before withdrawing. The airfield was surrendered at about 0830 and two hours later the first Allied aircraft (18 Hurricanes) landed on it.

West of Algiers, the British 11th Infantry Brigade Group (7,230 men) landed between Castiglione and Zéralda.

'We clambered over the side and down the landing nets into the landing craft, our way lighted by gun flashes as British battleships shelled the coastal batteries west of Algiers,' wrote a correspondent with the British Commandos. 'When the landing craft left the transport there was a curious sensation of being alone.'

The weather was good and the lights of the coastal towns were still shining when the soldiers arrived on the beach at around 0100. Before dawn, both Castiglione and Zéralda were in Allied hands.

East of Cap Sidi Ferruch and its old fortress, the 168th Combat Team (4,400 Americans and 1,100 British) was to land and secure the coastal batteries along the coast. The Commandos easily captured the Fort de Sidi Ferruch, but Fort Duperré resisted until after dawn. A few well-placed bombs of the Fleet Air Arm induced the fortress to surrender.

### **Confusion**

The bulk of the 168th Combat Team landed with some difficulty and were dispersed over 15 miles of coastline. Confusion, and not the French, was the major cause. After getting organized, the unit moved inland against light resistance. When they reached Lambiridi, where the official residence of General Juin was located, the French began to fire on the Allies from a hill west of the town.

By noon, soldiers of three battalions were grappling with the French in Lambiridi, who had the support of an armoured car. Combat continued throughout the afternoon but during lulls in the fighting a French Red Cross ambulance helped both American and French wounded.

Eventually, the 1st Battalion of the 168th Combat Team extricated itself from the fighting and hooked around Lambiridi, entering Algiers at about 1500. They captured the Palais d'Été and headed deeper into the city, where sniper fire wounded one man and killed the battalion's commander, Lt-Colonel Edward Doyle.

Other thrusts were made towards the Blida airfield. It was reached by the end



of the day but the French would not give it up. While it was made useless to the French Air Force, it was also unusable by the Allies.

In addition to the landings east and west of the capital, it was decided to send a force directly against the harbour. The facilities needed to be captured intact, and it was hoped that the French would not fire on the Americans as they approached.

The British destroyers 'Broke' and 'Malcolm' carried 74 Royal Navy men, three British Army officers, 24 American officers and 638 men of the US 34th Division. Though they had trained in Belfast Harbour for this assignment, they were not prepared for the test they would face.

The 'Broke' was to enter the harbour first, followed by the 'Malcolm' 15 minutes later. As the two ships approached, the lights of the harbour went out and searchlights switched on, blinding the Allied ships. French guns then opened up and began shelling the invaders. Both ships twice failed to enter the port successfully and had to circle around for another attempt. A little after 0400 the 'Malcolm' was hit and fire broke out on its deck. The ship withdrew, with 10 killed and 25 wounded on board.

The 'Broke' finally made it into the harbour on her fourth attempt and landed her troops, numbering a little over one company's worth of men, at around 0520. They moved into the port and captured their objectives, including the power station and fuel tanks, harassed only by small arms fire. Ships were captured at anchor and by morning it appeared that the 'Broke' alone had succeeded in her mission. The men in Algiers hoped to link up with the Allied troops that were surely approaching the centre of the city.

But at around 0800, the French began to defend themselves more vigorously. Twice the 'Broke' had to change positions to avoid artillery fire, and in so doing separated herself from the men onshore. At around 0920 the 'Broke' suffered a few hits and sounded the signal for withdrawal. About 60 men scampered aboard while the remainder stayed in the city. Twenty minutes later the ship had left the bay and met up with the 'Zetland', which took on the 'Broke's' passengers and began towing her.

While units of the Fleet Air Arm punished the coastal batteries around the port, the men of the 34th Division pushed back the Senegalese forces that had surrounded them. But when French armoured reinforcements arrived and the Americans ran out of ammunition, Lt-Colonel Edwin Swenson, the

commanding officer, was forced to surrender. His men were held as prisoners for two days but the French neglected to sabotage the port facilities.

### French Resistance

Those members of the French Resistance that the Allies had contacted in Algiers did not lay dormant during the battle. They captured most of the capital shortly after midnight and held them when the sun rose. But with the Allies halted at Lambiridi and Fort de l'Eau, and with General Giraud's appeal falling on deaf ears, the Resistance eventually lost control of the city to the loyal Vichy French officers before the end of the day. A ceasefire was finally called by Admiral Darlan, who had decided to throw in his lot with the Allies in the evening. Darlan was able to command the respect that Giraud could not, and as night fell in Algiers the Allies were in full control of the Algerian capital. The situation was quite different at Oran.

Boasting a population of 200,000 people, Oran was western Algeria's most important city. Situated at the base of a wide bay flanked by Cap Falcon to the west and Pointe de l'Aiguille to the east, the city hosted 13 coastal batteries and about 100 aircraft at the airfield at La Sénia. The Oran Division under General Robert Boissau had about 10,000 men in the vicinity of the city, and it was expected that Boissau could increase his force to 18,000 men within 24 hours and 22,000 men within five days. Many of the men posted in Oran were hardened veterans of the fighting in Syria, and memories of Mers-el-Kebir, just outside Oran, still



The Allies found an ally in Admiral Francois Darlan, who administered French North Africa for them until his assassination in December 1942.

rankled with the French in the region.

Landings began in and around Oran at about 0130 on 8 November. Elements of the 1st Armoured Division landed about 30 miles west of the city at Mersa bou Zedjar while the 26th Regimental Combat Team of the 1st Infantry Division landed near Les Andalouses just west of Cap Falcon. The majority of Allied forces landed about 25 miles east of the city in the Gulf of Arzew (16th and 18th Regimental Combat Teams of the 1st Infantry Division and elements of the 1st Armoured Division). About 50 miles separated the westernmost and easternmost landings.

Part of the 82nd Airborne Division was also earmarked for the assault, but

The guns of HMS Rodney in action pre-war, proved useful countering Vichy French shore artillery.







American Commandos pose for a picture in North Africa.

due to bad weather and a long flight that took them over Spain, the paratroopers that did make it to Oran were widely dispersed and would not play a significant role in the battle.

At Mersa bou Zedjar, the tanks of the 1st Armoured landed without difficulty and were moving inland before dawn. They met only a few French road-blocks, which offered little resistance.

At Les Andalouses, an uncharted sandbar caused more trouble than the French, who did not oppose the landing. 'La Surprise', a French warship, did attempt to interfere but was sunk by the HMS Brilliant at 0715 after a half-hour fire fight.

The 3rd Battalion of the 26th RCT took off from Les Andalouses for Ferme Combiere but was pinned down at 0740

by French artillery fire coming from the heights of Djebel Santon. Small arms fire from Djebel Murdjadjo also kept their heads down, and the 3rd Battalion was unable to move for the rest of the day.

The landing beaches were under fire from the guns of Fort du Santon throughout the day. The Llangibby Castle and the Monarch of Bermuda were both damaged by its shells. Even the 'Rodney' became engaged but could not silence the coastal battery.

In the east, the 1st Ranger Battalion went in well ahead of the rest of the troops in order to capture two coastal batteries that could cause trouble to the landings in the Gulf of Arzew. Splitting into two groups, the Rangers approached the coast in small boats, took out the

French sentries, and captured one of their objectives while its French defenders were still asleep. The other group scrambled up the cliffs of the gulf and approached their battery from the rear, capturing it after a brief fight.

'When our boat arrived somewhere between Mole 3 and Grand Quai, a blast of machine gun fire was fired from the shore ahead,' wrote Walter Ansel who was with the landing parties at Arzew. 'Shouts of Hi-ho Silver, and a small amount of firing could be heard further over to the right which indicated that the Rangers were engaged at their mission at the fort.'

The landings at Arzew were successful and the French put up little resistance. A 75mm artillery piece in the hills beyond the town, however, maintained an intermittent bombardment of the landing beaches that was a nuisance but did little to slow the landings.

### Withering rifle

At 0120 the 7,000 men of the 18th RCT landed on the African shore. Its 3rd Battalion was sent to occupy Arzew while the 1st Battalion marched inland to capture the town of St Cloud and the high ground between it and Oran. The 3rd Battalion captured 62 prisoners in Arzew after some resistance.

'We set off on the road behind [the beach] towards Arzew,' wrote Lt Victor Boatwright, 'along with a platoon from the 18th RCT that had landed in the same wave. Just as we reached the outskirts of the town, reveille was sounded in a







Allied forces land at Surcouf.

small French Naval Air Station there, and French sailors manned a small gun in the station, and began firing. However, the Lieutenant and his men scaled the wall and knocked out the gun. The French there surrendered.'

West of Rénan on its approach to St Cloud, the 1st Battalion was attacked by five French armoured cars. They were destroyed in short order but the garrison of St Cloud would not be swept aside so easily. Men of the 16th Tunisian Infantry Regiment and a battalion of the Foreign Legion manned its defences, and laid down withering rifle and machine-gun fire on the 1st Battalion as it approached around noon. The Americans tried to storm the town but were thrown back. A second attempt was made at 1530 with the help of the 2nd Battalion, but it too was a failure. The 3rd Battalion arrived at the end of the day and plans were drawn up to assault the town the next morning.

Meanwhile, the 16th RCT (5,600 men) pushed inland towards Fleurus, southwest of St Cloud, after a successful landing in the Gulf of Arzew. They met heavy resistance from the 2nd Algerian Infantry Regiment at La Macta, but the village was eventually captured at 1330 when reinforcements and fire support from the HMS Farndale were brought to bear on the defenders.

Combat Command B of the 1st Armoured also pushed inland and reached the Tafaraoui airfield at around 1115, 25 miles from the landing beaches. The airfield was rushed and 300 prisoners were captured. By 1630, the first Allied aircraft landed at the airfield, though one was destroyed when it was jumped by four French fighters that had been mistaken as friendly. CCB was unable to push on to the larger airfield at La Sénia, however, as French resistance hardened. Twice,

the airfield there was attacked by Allied aircraft, and five Dewoitines were claimed at the cost of three British planes.

East and west of Oran, the Allies discovered that the French were not ready to welcome them as liberators. Giraud had been ignored and the hardy Vichy defenders stubbornly refused to capitulate. But nowhere in Algeria did the Allies meet as determined a defence as they did in Oran Harbour itself.

### Ram French ship

As in Algiers, a picked group of men were to be sent into the port in order to capture its facilities intact. The 'Walney' and 'Hartland' carried 17 officers and 376 men of the 1st Armoured Division, 26 men from the US Navy, six Marines, and 52

easy as that.'

On its approach to the shore, the 'Walney' was met by a French destroyer. The 'Walney' attempted to ram the French ship but barely missed it. As the two ships slid past each other, the guns of the French destroyer caused horrific casualties on the deck of the British ship.

'It seemed to me that all hell broke loose around us,' wrote Disher. 'We were hit time and again... [The destroyer fired] at almost muzzle-end range. The bridge was raked and raked again.'

Smoking, the 'Walney' continued on and came under even heavier fire.

'The following action is fuzzy and because we were all blacked out hands and face wearing American helmets or British helmets no one could identify one

'Not until four days before the convoys would deploy off the beaches at Algiers, Oran, and Casablanca were the few Frenchmen we had contacted informed of the actual date for the operation. This, of course, made it extremely difficult, in cases impossible, for these French officials to take all the steps necessary to facilitate our landings.'  
– General George C Marshall

Royal Navy men. Both of these ships were US-made but British-manned, as they had been handed over to the United Kingdom as part of the Lend Lease program.

The French naval soldiers were ready and waiting at Oran, having been roused out of bed by the landings east and west of the city. The lights in the harbour were blacked out as the 'Walney' approached the port five minutes ahead of the 'Hartland'. They both entered the harbour at around 0300 and immediately came under heavy fire.

'Shells and bullets crashed into us, and almost as the Walney shuddered with the impact she snapped the boom,' wrote Leo Disher, war correspondent on board the 'Walney'. 'We were through. It had been as

another,' recalled Lieutenant Wallace Moseley, an officer of the 'Walney'. 'All the grenade throwers were killed, and all but two officers and three men from the combined boarding parties... Our remaining guns were silenced and the ship was on fire forward and amidships. We had lost over half of our ship's company and the carnage among the troops on the mess-decks was indescribable. I therefore gave the order to unprime the five-charge pattern of depth charges still primed, followed by an order to abandon ship.'

Meanwhile, the 'Hartland' was undergoing the same rough treatment that the 'Walney' had received. In the confusion, the 'Hartland' rammed into the jetty and needed to take another run at the harbour.



Upon entering, she ran past the French destroyer 'Typhon', whose guns ripped into the thin walls of the 'Hartland', setting the ship on fire. The 'Hartland', at risk of blowing up at any moment, was given the order to abandon ship. The attempt to take Oran Harbour by force had failed.

In all, only three officers and 44 enlisted men reached dry land unhurt. Allied casualties numbered a little over 300 dead and 250 wounded, with many of them being the Royal Navy sailors who manned the two ships. The French defenders took the survivors prisoner, where they remained for the duration of the battle for Oran.

By the day's end, the landings at Oran had been a limited success. The landing beaches had been secured, as had one of the airfields. The disaster at Oran and the inability of the Americans to reach the city was, however, a setback. Unlike at Algiers, Darlan's call for a ceasefire (repudiated by Pétain) was not heeded at Oran.

### Foreign Legion

While the Allies took control of Algiers and began the march eastwards towards Tunisia, the battle continued to rage in Oran. East of the city, the offensive against St Cloud was renewed at 0700 on 9 November, but it soon ran out of steam and resulted in heavy Allied casualties. A plan was then drawn up to attack the town with all three battalions of the 18th RCT after a 30-minute artillery bombardment. General Terry Allen, commander of the 1st Infantry Division, cancelled the plans as soon as he became aware of them. Instead, he had the town covered by one battalion and sent the other two around St Cloud so that the drive on Oran could be resumed.

In the early morning, it became clear that the French were preparing a counter-attack. Three Spitfires located a column of French troops near Sidi-bel-Abbes. These men, part of the Foreign Legion, were strafed and bombed for the next four to five hours.

The French re-grouped and sent a battalion across the La Macta River,

as 'horrible'. Air units from the 'Furious' were sent in to silence the French artillery and the battalion was told 'Help coming: tanks, engineers, bombers, Spitfires.' The HMS Jamaica joined the 'Farndale' to provide gunnery support, but eventually the 1st Battalion managed to repel the French from La Macta on their own.

A French armoured counter-attack was also being prepared seven miles east of

'The coxswain lowered the ramp, I cried "Follow me!" and stepped off—up to my waist. We were on a sandbar. There was no real problem: we weren't far offshore, the sea was warm, and although I was festooned with equipment (tommy gun, bandolier with extra cartridges, gas mask, map case, etc.), I got ashore with no trouble. As I reached the beach, I saw a cameraman photographing us. Hardly a heroic occasion!' — Lt Victor Boatwright, 8 November 1942

attacking the 1st Battalion of the 16th RCT in the rear. The American soldiers became surrounded, and a naval gunfire officer attached to the unit reported the situation

Tafaraoui. Tank destroyers of Combat Command B moved in and opened fire from a hill about 800 yards from St Lucien, where the French tanks were assembling.

Two platoons of US tanks then advanced with a third in the rear. The French were forced to withdraw, leaving 14 Renault AMC 35s behind to the Americans' loss of one tank. Though the French had failed in re-taking Tafaraoui, they did delay the Americans there from mounting an assault on La Sénia.

In the end, however, it was not the men who had landed near Arzew that took La Sénia, it was elements of the 1st Armoured that had landed in the west. They had hooked around the French position at Misserhin and took the airfield from the east at about 1000. Most of its defenders were heading into Oran but 159 were taken prisoner. Artillery near Valmy opened on the airfield and pinned down the Americans, and it wasn't until the afternoon before reinforcements arrived and the French were chased off.

Further north, the 26th RCT continued its advance on Oran, meeting heavy







US armour rolls ashore during Operation Torch in North Africa, November 1942.

resistance west of Mers-el-Kebir from 600 men of the 2nd Zouaves Regiment. Misserhin also held out against two American attacks.

With the fall of La Sénia, the last Vichy French aircraft flew out of Oran for Morocco, where the battle was still raging. By now, the Axis had become a factor in the battle for Algeria, as a destroyer had been damaged by an Axis bomber near Algiers on the evening of the 8th and two cruisers, two destroyers, and the Massachusetts were damaged near that port on the 9th by German aircraft and submarines.

'I was salvaging boats with my crew about 1500,' wrote Chief Boatswain's Mate Hunter Wood on the 'Leedstown', 'and a Ju88 came out and made a long shallow bank to starboard and came in on her, dropped three bombs which missed her port. Another Ju88 came in to starboard and dropped three more, which missed. She was firing like mad

and a minute later there was a terrific explosion starboard side amidships, probably a torpedo. She rolled over and listed to starboard.'

#### **Assault on city**

At the end of the day on the 9th, General Giraud flew into Algiers where it became clear no one would follow him. The Allies banked on Admiral Darlan, however, who agreed to act in the name of Vichy France and call a ceasefire throughout North Africa. The call was not taken up everywhere, as on the 10th the final stages of the battle for Oran needed to be played out.

The assault on the city was planned for that morning. Five battalions of the 1st Infantry Division from the east and three from the northwest were to take part, with heavy support from artillery and the navy. While units of the 1st Armoured Division were still dispersed across the region from Tafaraoui to Arzew, it was hoped that

enough of the division's tanks could be scrapped together for an assault on Oran from the south.

The 2nd Battalion of the 16th RCT met heavy resistance near St Eugène in its attack, held up by soldiers of the 2nd Zouaves for several hours. After breaking through, they were again halted near Arcole, while the 3rd Battalion busied itself with the coastal batteries around Oran. Neither unit would reach their objective by noon.

But three hours earlier Combat Command B of the 1st Armoured managed to make a run on the city, entering it at 0900. By noon, the Americans had captured Oran, with only a few isolated snipers still causing problems. The port was quickly secured and the artillery and air attacks scheduled for the city were cancelled.

General Boissau finally issued a ceasefire at 1215, meeting with General Fredendall about 15 minutes later. The surrender terms were discussed, and it was decided that the French would be confined to their barracks but not taken prisoner, and that all prisoners that were held were to be released. General Boissau would retain his command and work with the Allies to maintain order in the city. Along with the white flag of surrender, the French tricolor would continue to fly over Oran, as it did at Algiers.

The armour of CCB had dealt the final blow to the French, who were fighting mostly on the outskirts of the city. St Cloud, along with other French positions, only surrendered after the ceasefire reached them.

Losses at Oran were heavy, but had taken place mostly during the attempt to force the harbour on the 8th. Total losses for the 1st Armoured Division were 191 killed, 105 wounded, and nine missing. The 1st Infantry Division lost 85 killed, 221 wounded, and seven missing. French losses numbered about 165 killed.

On the same day that Oran finally capitulated, Hitler met with Pierre Laval, the Premier of Vichy France. Having already made up his mind before meeting the French leader, Hitler demanded that his forces be allowed to land in Tunisia unhindered. Laval, clinging to a now-illusory neutrality, refused. While Laval retired to have a smoke in the next room, Hitler gave the order to occupy all Vichy territory in southern France and Corsica. The order was implemented the following day and executed without a shot being fired •



First Relief of Lucknow by Major General Henry Havelock in September 1857 with 78th Highlanders, but rebels returned to lay siege to the city. (Peter Newark's Military Pictures)



# *Six VCs in One Day*

At Lucknow, the 93rd Highlanders had to take a rebel stronghold at the point of the bayonet. In an extract from *Highlander (Constable)*, now out in paperback, TIM NEWARK describes the brutal brawl and the shower of medals that followed.



**W**hen Lieutenant William McBean of the 93rd Highlanders arrived in the Crimea, he feared he was too late to take part in the fighting. He had been left behind at Varna for a good part of the campaign to look after the baggage animals. But he did have an opportunity to prove his mettle when he stepped forward to settle a fight between Turkish and French troops. The Sultan was so impressed by his fearless behaviour that he awarded him the Order of Medjidie 3rd Class. It was good, but McBean hungered for more.

Finally, the 36-year-old joined the assault forces in September 1855 and was so keen to get stuck in that he volunteered along with ten other Highlanders to creep up towards the Russian defences at the Redan, prior to their main attack. But so quiet was the Russian position that McBean suspected something was wrong and the volunteers entered the fieldworks, finding only dead and wounded. The Russians had left before McBean could get to grips with them. It was all very frustrating for a man of action. This would change with McBean's next posting—India 1858. There, he would get more than enough frontline combat.

### Severe and merciless

The Indian Mutiny had broken out in May 1857. Up until this time, Britain's dominance over India was maintained by the East India Company, with armed forces composed mainly of native troops called sepoys. The British Army had only a few regular units posted there. Unrest between the sepoys and their British commanders had been simmering for some time but the spark that set off the mutiny was provided by the introduction of a new rifle cartridge. The rumour took off that this was greased with animal fat, incorporating that of cows, sacred to Hindus, and pigs, unclean to Muslims. As the paper cartridge had to be bitten before loading, this proved a major problem for the native soldiers.

Some British officers understood their reluctance but others would not tolerate any refusal to use the cartridge and declared the sepoys mutineers and imprisoned them. At Meerut, the mutineers broke out and massacred any European officers and their families they could find.

Political agitators seized on the mutiny to encourage a general uprising against British rule and the fighting spread to Delhi and other cities where more European men, women and children

were butchered. At Cawnpore, over 200 European non-combatants were guaranteed safe passage by the rebels but then cruelly murdered. It was this savagery directed against women and children that enraged the British and made their response to the Mutiny severe and merciless.

Colour Sergeant George Wells of the 79th Cameron Highlanders was part of the force sent from Britain to restore order. His ship set sail in August 1857. By the time he arrived in India, the original events were passed, but he attended the site of the

their children were slaughtered by rebel swordsmen, who hacked away at them, dismembered their bodies and threw them down the well. The horror of those dreadful moments resonated throughout the British forces and their vengeance would be terrible.

### Thin Red Liners

Sir Colin Campbell was at home on Britain on 11 July 1857 when he received the call from the Prime Minister Lord Palmerston to head the British Army in India, after his predecessor had died of cholera during the



Uniformed sepoys of the British Army in Indian in 1845. Muslim and Hindu sepoys formed the rebel armies of the Mutiny. (Peter Newark's Military Pictures)

massacre in Cawnpore.

'I visited the place where the blood thirsty wretches committed such vile and cruel deeds upon our poor and unfortunate women,' recalled Wells. 'The house where they were committed has since [been] levelled to the ground and there was a tree that grew close by this house [where] they were in the habit of tying the women and cutting off their breasts. There is also a well close by where the sepoys threw them down after they tortured them in every conceivable shape they could think of.'

The women prisoners were not in fact tortured as Wells says, but they and

early months of the Mutiny. He was asked how soon he could leave for India. 'Within 24 hours,' he replied. Just over a month later, he arrived in Calcutta and began assembling his forces. Among the troops newly arrived from Britain were the 93rd Highlanders, Campbell's Thin Red Liners. They greeted each other like old friends, with the 93rd wildly cheering their old commander.

At the time, the 93rd were characterised as the most Highland of all the Scots regiments with 70% of them speaking Gaelic. They were also the most religious of the Highland regiments with a minister and six elders selected from the



ranks. Those other Crimean Highland veterans, the 79th, would join Campbell later in the year.

Campbell's first move was to march into the kingdom of Oudh and come to the relief of the British garrison besieged at its capital city of Lucknow, stoutly defended by Highlanders of the 78th. On the way, Campbell and the 93rd also visited Cawnpore and witnessed the site of the massacre of the women and children—the bloody handprints of desperate children could still be seen on the walls. Campbell's army numbered about 5,000 troops with the addition of numerous loyal Indian warriors, including the impressively aggressive Punjabis.

The 93rd included volunteers from other Highland regiments and one of these was getting a strange reputation. James Wallace had come from the 72nd Highlanders. It was noted that he neither wrote nor received any letters and was so taciturn in his manner that he was dubbed Quaker Wallace. In fact he was highly educated and could translate any Latin quotations shown to him. At night, he was heard to recite French poetry to himself. It was suggested that because of his evident education he should be promoted, but he resolutely refused, saying that he had joined the 93rd for one purpose only and when that was accomplished he was happy to die. As the Highlanders marched towards Lucknow, many of them said they would give up a day's drink just to see the mysterious Quaker Wallace under fire.

Dr William Munro was surgeon to the 93rd. Early on the morning of 16 November, as Campbell and his Highlanders readied themselves for their attack on the Sikanderbagh, a fortified palace just outside Lucknow, Munro had a quiet conversation with one of his Highlanders. Captain John Lumsden was an officer in the East India Company army but had joined the 93rd for the expedition against Lucknow.

'That is the last sunrise that many will see,' he told Munro, 'and God knows to which of us three standing by this fire it may be the last.' Lumsden was a large, powerful man in perfect health, but there was 'at the moment he spoke an expression of sadness, perhaps of anxious care, upon his face, for he had just returned hurriedly to India, having left his wife and bairns at home in Scotland.' The dread feeling did little to discourage him from his path of duty, noted Munro, or affect his courage when the time came to lead his men into action. But two hours later, Lumsden and another officer present at that meeting would lie dead in the bitter



**Second Relief of Lucknow in November 1857 with 93rd Highlanders storming their way into the city. Painting by W Rainey. (Peter Newark's Military Pictures)**

battle for Sikanderbagh.

The Mughal palace was heavily defended by the rebels and was the last major obstacle before the relief army could reach the beleaguered British garrison holding out in the Residency compound nearby. Inside, soldiers of the 78th Highlanders were protecting the civilians, but doubted they could hang on for much longer.

One of the soldiers' wives, a Scots woman called Jessie Brown was sunk in a fever, but then she heard a distant sound that roused her. 'Dinna ye hear it?' she said to her friend. 'Ay, I'm no dreamin', it's the slogan o' the Highlanders! We're saved, we're saved!' Her friend had no idea what she was talking about. 'I felt utterly bewildered: my English ears heard only the roar of the artillery, and I thought my poor Jessie was still raving...' But then Jessie sprang to her feet and cried out in a voice that could be heard by their Highland defenders—'Will ye no believe it noo?'

'That shrill, penetrating, ceaseless

sound,' said a newspaper report, 'which rose above all other sounds, could come neither from the advance of the enemy, nor from the work of the sappers. No, it was indeed the blast of the Scottish bagpipes, now shrill and harsh, as threatening vengeance on the foe, then in softer tones seeming to promise succour to their friends in need.'

It was the pipes of the 93rd Highlanders and they promised relief to those locked inside the residency. The sweet droning sound assured them of survival and this heart-stirring account inspired a song called Jessie's Dream that was highly popular back home in Britain's music halls.

### **Use the bayonet**

Two days earlier, Campbell had told his Highlanders that they faced a task greater than that in the Crimea. Not only did they have to deal with a rebel army trained and armed by the British, but they also had to rescue the men, women and





**Highlanders march into Lucknow after having won six Victoria Crosses in one day. In reality, the Highlanders would have worn a mixture of scarlet and khaki-style jackets with kilts and trousers. (Peter Newark's Military Pictures)**

children weakened by their ordeal in the Lucknow Residency.

'When we make an attack,' instructed Campbell, 'you must come to close quarters as quickly as possible; keep well together, and use the bayonet. Ninety-Third, you are my own lads! I rely on you to do the work!'

'Ay, ay, Sir Colin,' shouted a Highlander. 'We'll bring the women and children out of Lucknow or die with you in the attempt!'

Corporal William Mitchell of the 93rd witnessed this exchange and provides the most dramatic account of the following action on the 16th. While Campbell let his artillery batter the walls of Sikanderbagh to create breaches for them to enter, he told his Highlanders to shelter behind a low mud wall.

'Lie down, Ninety-Third, lie down! Every man of you is worth his weight in gold in England today!'

One Highlander ignored his command and stood up, swearing at the enemy. He

was one of the volunteers who had joined from the 72nd and was considered a bad sort. His name was Hope and his Captain bellowed at him to shut up, telling him that foul language was no sign of bravery.

Hope ignored him and carried on swearing, saying that the bullet was not yet moulded that would kill him. The Captain was just about to arrest him as drunk and disorderly in the face of the enemy, when Hope leapt on top of the mud wall. Right then, an enemy bullet struck him. Diverted by the buckle of his sporran, the bullet tore into his belly so his guts fell out. Two more shots struck him in the chest, killing him stone dead. At that moment, Quaker Wallace rushed over to where the dead man lay and stared intently into his face.

'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,' declared Wallace. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. I came to the 93rd to see that man die!'

His mystery was explained and the assault went ahead. Punjabis led the race to the breaches in the wall, but when two

of their British officers were shot down before them, they staggered to a halt. Campbell then turned to one of his senior officers and said: 'Bring on the tartan—let my own lads at them.'

Nearly 800 Highlanders rose with one roar. Their eight pipers played 'On With the Tartan' as they ran towards the weakened palace walls and threw themselves through the breaches against the defenders. Not caring if he died or not, Quaker Wallace burst into the palace, coolly reciting verses from the 116th Psalm as he lashed out at anyone before him: 'I love the Lord, because my voice and prayers He did hear...' Shooting and bayoneting any rebel who dared come near, it was said that Wallace killed at least 20 men that day and not one of them touched him.

Corporal Mitchell watched all his Highlanders fight with a fury he had not witnessed before: 'By the time the bayonet had done its work of retribution, the throats of our men were hoarse with shouting "Cawnpore! You bloody murderers!" The taste of the powder (the muzzle-loading cartridges had to be bitten with the teeth) made men almost mad with thirst; and with the sun high over head, and being fresh from England, with our feather bonnets, red coats, and heavy kilts, we felt the heat intensely.'

As he climbed in through a breach, Mitchell was hit by a bullet at point-blank range. It struck his belt buckle and knocked him off his feet. His fellow officers rushed past him, thinking he was dead. Some of them had bought their own non-regulation broadswords, which performed better than the shorter army blades that broke easily. All the time, they encouraged their men by shouting 'Give 'em the bayonet!' A thrust to a rebel belly was called giving him a 'Cawnpore dinner'.

### **Brutal brawl**

Campbell had instructed his Highlanders to fight in groups of three. The centre man of each group was to make the attack, while the other two defended him with their bayonets right and left. 'We were not to fire a single bullet after we got inside a position,' recalled Mitchell, 'unless we were certain of hitting our enemy, for fear of wounding our men.'

But as the close quarter fighting deteriorated into a brutal brawl, strict instructions were forgotten. The wire frame of the extravagant feather bonnet worn by the Highlanders proved surprisingly useful, saving lives by absorbing the blows of tulwars aimed at



their skulls. Other soldiers were saved by their greatcoats being rolled tightly across their chests—absorbing the impact of enemy bullets.

The 93rd pipers played throughout the desperate room-to-room struggle, following their soldiers as they advanced through the palace. ‘I knew our boys would fight all the better when cheered by the bagpipes,’ said Pipe Major John Macleod, ‘with the national music to cheer them.’ The Punjabis were excited by the music too and later adopted the pipes.

The ferocity of the Highlanders was matched by the Punjabi soldiers that followed them into the breach, plus Irishmen of the 53rd Light Infantry. No prisoners were taken and at the end of the battle over 2,000 rebels lay dead inside the Sikanderbagh. The 93rd lost two officers and 23 men dead, plus seven officers and 61 men wounded. Outside the palace, the Highlanders and the Irishmen of the 53rd lined up before Sir Colin Campbell to receive his thanks.



**Sir Colin Campbell, celebrated commander of Highlanders in the Crimean War and during the Indian Mutiny. Engraving by DJ Pound from a photograph by Mayall. (Peter Newark's Military Pictures)**

‘This morning’s work will strike terror into the sepoys,’ he said. ‘Ninety-Third, you have bravely done your share of this morning’s work, and Cawnpore is avenged! There is more hard work to be done; but unless as a last resource, I will not call on you to storm more positions today.’

The soldiers lauded their leader, then a lone voice came from the ranks.

‘Will we get a medal for this, Sir Colin?’ ‘Well, my lads, I can’t say what Her Majesty’s Government may do; but if you don’t get a medal, all I can say is you have deserved one better than any other troops I have ever seen under fire.’

In the event, the 93rd Highlanders were awarded six Victoria Crosses for that one savage day of fighting at Lucknow. Captain William Stewart and Lance Corporal John Dunlay were the first Highlanders to enter one of the breaches at Sikanderbagh. With a few men, Stewart led an attack on two rebel guns that were halting their advance and captured them. Colour Sergeant James Munro later rescued Captain Stewart when he was badly wounded and carried him to safety, subsequently being hurt himself.

Private Peter Grant defended his colonel by killing five rebels with one of their own swords. Private David MacKay captured one of the rebel standards and was nominated for the award by his fellow soldiers. He was shortly afterwards severely wounded. Sergeant John Paton led his men into a breach under heavy fire. It had been a remarkably intense battle that had demanded the highest courage of all involved.

Victory at Sikanderbagh did not end the fighting at Lucknow and the 93rd Highlanders had to stir themselves for a final surge towards the Residency. Having safely evacuated the exhausted garrison of men, women and children from their siege by the rebels, Campbell then had to make the difficult decision to withdraw before the numerically superior enemy, leaving only a token force behind. The city of Lucknow was surrounded by 12-miles of fortified walls and it was impossible for his small army to capture it. That task would come later—and the chance for Lieutenant McBean to win the medal he missed at Sikanderbagh.

### **Popular appointment**

In March 1858, Sir Colin Campbell returned to Lucknow to deal with unfinished business. With him this time were all three Highland regiments that had performed so well in the Crimea—the 91st, the 79th Cameron Highlanders and the 42nd Black Watch. It was a much bigger army—including 164 artillery guns—and Campbell was prepared to take the city itself.

A few days before the assault, Sir Colin gathered his 93rd Highlanders together and read them a letter he had just received from the Duke of Cambridge. It said that as a consequence of the death of their regimental colonel the post had

become vacant and had been awarded to Campbell. ‘I know that it is the highest compliment that Her Majesty could pay to the Ninety-Third Highlanders,’ declared the Duke, ‘to see their dear old chief at their head.’

The soldiers hurrahed their new colonel until they were hoarse. Not only it was an enormously popular appointment because Sir Colin had taken a special interest in the welfare of their regiment—ensuring always they were never needlessly exposed to danger—but he also shared their day-to-day existence, camping out like a private soldier and eating their rations.

Very early in the morning in the second week of March 1858, Campbell and his troops advanced through the suburbs of Lucknow, eliminating rebel strongholds along the way. Some of the sepoys hid themselves in the cellars of buildings and would emerge only when they thought the main force had passed. This caused the Highlanders a few casualties until they realised what was going on and they hunted down every sniper. Campbell brought up his siege guns and mortars to bombard the city.

Colour Sergeant George Wells of the 79th Cameron Highlanders was part of the initial advance on Lucknow. He was ordered to act as a picket, looking out for rebels. He hoped this meant he could lie down for a bit and get some rest: ‘I was miserably mistaken for the flies were in millions and would not allow you to lie down during the day and what with the mosquitoes at night and the roar of the cannon it was next to impossible to have 40 winks.’

He gave up and took to the roof of a bungalow where he watched British mortar shells dropping on a palace inside the city. The rebels returned fire and one shell plunged over the bungalow to set fire to houses behind it. Wells and his men got a rest the next day, but after that they were told to assemble for the news that the final assault on the city was imminent.

Their target was an iron bridge across the river Gumti. When his Captain asked Wells if he had made out his will before leaving the camp, he said he had no fear for his own life, but believed that many Highlanders would die in the assault on the iron bridge as the rebels had a gun battery trained on the approach to it. The Captain smiled but said nothing.

Despite this sense of foreboding, Wells and his troops were ordered to march towards the iron bridge. At the last moment, they received orders to return to camp. Wells considered it a ‘lucky job that our plans had been altered... [as] we





Highlanders on picket duty with mutineers hanged in the background.  
(Peter Newark's Military Pictures)

would not have come off scott free.'

On 16 March, Wells and his troops mustered again for an assault on the city. They marched out in the same direction as the iron bridge but to the relief of them all turned down a lane toward a pontoon bridge made of barrels that crossed the river and allowed them to enter the Residency, just outside the main city walls. As Wells passed through the ruins caused by the British bombardment, he saw the body of a woman clad in military equipment. Female fighters had been noted at the battle of Sikanderbagh, but whereas this made some Highlanders hesitate, others had dealt with them just as ruthlessly as the male rebels.

### Blown up

Crossing the river by the pontoon meant the 79th could now capture the enemy artillery covering the iron bridge. This decision by Campbell not to sacrifice his soldiers in a direct attack on the bridge saved many lives. By the time Wells got to the bridge, his men found one rebel sepoy hidden among the rubble.

'It would appear that he had hidden himself some way or another in a cellar,' recalled Wells, 'and he fired no less than

three shots upon our men 79th, but I am happy to say with no ill effects upon our men. He was then brought forth from his hiding place, his firelock taken from him and broken. We then took his ammunition out of his pouch and very politely blew him up with his own ammunition.'

The Highlanders moved around the walls of the city shooting down any males they came across. They then set up camp inside a mosque. The rebels proceeded to shell it with their artillery. The British brought up their own guns and Wells claimed he was hard of hearing for the next couple of days thanks to the blast of these weapons.

As the 79th Highlanders made their advance, many of the rebels were busy abandoning the defences of the city. Some of them attacked the small garrison at Alambagh that Campbell had left behind after his first relief of the Residency. Failing to take that, many of the rebels deserted the city. More skirmishing followed, but, mercifully, Wells and his soldiers were spared a contested assault on the city walls. Lucknow was theirs for the taking.

It was during the fighting around Lucknow that the 38-year-old Lieutenant

William McBean of the 93rd Highlanders finally got his opportunity to show what ferocious warrior he was. Regimental surgeon William Munro recorded the moment McBean came under attack in the Begum Kothi palace outside the main city walls: 'One of our officers (MacBean) as brave a man as ever lived, and yet as simple as a child, found himself almost alone, and surrounded by the enemy. But he wielded his sword so dexterously, and made such good use of his revolver, that after a desperate struggle, in which he killed eleven of his foes, he stood unharmed.'

Toward the end of the struggle, other Highlanders ran up to help McBean, but he told them to back off as he finished off the last rebel with his sword. 'At length MacBean made a feint cut,' noted Forbes-Mitchell, 'but he instead gave the point, and put his sword through the chest of his opponent.' The divisional commander witnessed the extraordinary fight from the ramparts of the city, and recommended him for the Victoria Cross.

At a later regimental parade, a general pinned the medal on his chest, saying it was for his 'conspicuous gallantry displayed at the assault of the enemy's position in Lucknow'.





**The Relief of Lucknow painted by Thomas Jones Barker in 1859. The subject quickly became a favourite imperial theme, comprising both native brutality and British heroism. (Peter Newark's Military Pictures)**

'Tutts,' replied McBean, 'it didna tak' me twanty minutes.'

An Indian Maharajah later offered him a large sum of money to become his personal bodyguard, but McBean refused, preferring to stay in the army and eventually became Brevet Colonel of the 93rd.

### **Price in blood**

In total, the 93rd won seven Victoria Crosses during the Indian Mutiny, the 78th won eight VCs, the 42nd won eight. Noticeably absent from this roll call of glory was the 79th Cameron Highlanders. 'The 79th had two things to thank God for,' said one of their colonels disdainfully, 'one that they never had a man with the Victoria Cross, the other that they had never had a Staff College man.' The Camerons believed it was a soldier's responsibility to do his duty during war and peace and he should not be rewarded with medals for doing it. This regimental policy held fast for the rest of the 19th century until the Camerons received their first VC in 1900 during the Boer War.

The high rate of medals won by Highland regiments during the Indian Mutiny led some observers to question whether Highlanders were paying the price for glory in blood by being

constantly thrust into the most difficult of military situations. But Campbell was careful not to put his soldiers at unnecessary risk, cancelling at least one direct assault—by the 79th on the iron bridge at Lucknow—because of his concern.

After the taking of Lucknow, Highlanders enjoyed other less official prizes. The temptation to loot rich merchant houses around the bazaar was too great for many of them. Lieutenant Douglas Wimberley of the 79th made a note of some of the rich pickings. 'Twenty men came across 20 bags of 1000 R[upee]s each, and each one took one,' he said. Bandsmen MacGregor snatched a quantity of jewellery, while a

Corporal Leary and Corporal Macnab found a bag of gold. Leary had a handsome bracelet made out of his gold, while another Highlander give 70 Rupees to one who had missed out on the booty so he could console himself with a glass of grog.

Corporal Mitchell was put on guard duty outside a palace harem, along with other married members of the 93rd. He struck up a conversation with what appeared to be an old woman but was in fact the palace eunuch, who spoke perfect English. Some of the younger harem girls came out to chat to Mitchell

and his Highlanders, teasing him about his fair hair and their kilts. During his 24 hours on guard, Mitchell said he learned more 'about the virtues of polygamy and the domestic slavery, intrigues, and crimes of the harem than I have learned in all my other thirty-five years in India.'

The suppression of the Indian Mutiny continued into the summer of 1858, when the last rebel leaders were either killed or captured and executed. It had been a brutal campaign, with atrocities committed freely on both sides. The result of the conflict was that the rule of the East India Company was brought to an end and all the conquered Indian territories were formally incorporated into the British Empire. Queen Victoria became Empress of India in 1876.

Sir Colin Campbell came out of the war a national hero for avenging the crimes of Cawnpore. He was promoted to general and raised to the peerage as Baron Clyde in July 1858. He left India in 1860 and was given the rank of Field Marshal in 1862. A year later he died, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. He had served his Highlanders very well, commanding them in two major conflicts that made them heroes of British dominion and adding further laurels to their reputation around the world •



# Great Military Artists



'Battle of Waterloo' by Denis Dighton.

## Denis Dighton

**D**enis Dighton, whose career flourished from 1811 to 1825, was born into a family of successful military artists who enjoyed royal patronage. The second son of Robert Dighton (1752-1814), he was born in 1792 and studied art under his father and at the Royal Academy. He visited Spain and Portugal during the Peninsular War where his elder brother Robert, also a notable artist, was a serving officer. The earliest drawings by Denis are of Spanish and Portuguese soldiers. He first exhibited at the RA in 1811; in the same year he became an ensign in the 90th Perthshire Volunteers, but resigned a year later to marry.

### Artist at Waterloo

In 1815, Dighton was appointed Military Painter to the Prince Regent. He arrived at Waterloo a few days after the great battle and made nine drawings on the spot from which he produced watercolours and oils. He first exhibited a painting of Waterloo at the RA in 1816, for which the Prince Regent paid the artist £50. His work was shown annually at the RA until 1826. He

accompanied the Court when George IV visited Scotland in 1822 and recorded the colourful ceremonies and painted the Highland Chieftains and their retainers.

His work also encompassed Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. Between 1816 and 1821, he produced a large number of excellent images of the new French Royal Army. He possessed a remarkable watercolour technique and though he may be criticised as to the relative scales of man and horse, he was immensely skilful with his landscape and architectural backgrounds. After his last royal purchase in 1825, Denis Dighton became mentally deranged and retired to Brittany where he died in 1827 aged 35. He produced some 270 watercolours and oils during his short career and 243 are in the Royal Collection, plus 150 pencil and monochrome sketches.

### Dighton Family

Robert Dighton, senior, started painting in 1769 and his first military subject, of a London Volunteer, appeared in 1780. He portrayed his eldest son Robert in the uniform of the Prince of Wales's Volunteers in 1803; this portrait and 34



'Death of Nelson' by Denis Dighton.

other works by Robert senior are also in the Royal Collection. Both Robert and his eldest son have left fine records of the elaborate new uniforms of the Light Dragoons and Hussars.

Robert Dighton, junior, born in 1786, combined his artistic talent with a long service career. Commissioned an ensign in the West Norfolk Militia in 1809 he fought in the Peninsular campaign and in France 1810-14 and was wounded at Bayonne. He later joined the 16th Lancers in 1834 and served as a captain in India. He died in 1865 and 48 of his watercolours form part of the large Dighton Family oeuvre now in the Royal Collection •

*Peter Newark*



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Operation Valkyrie, WWII; Is Napoleon Overated?; Hitler's Cars, WWII; Ghosts of Zulu War; Battle for the Throne, Medieval Warfare.

### MI/250

WWII, Fighting Nazi Europe; Highlanders at Waterloo; Desperate German escape after Falaise; King Philip's Secret Weapon; Attila-the most terrible of all.

### MI/251

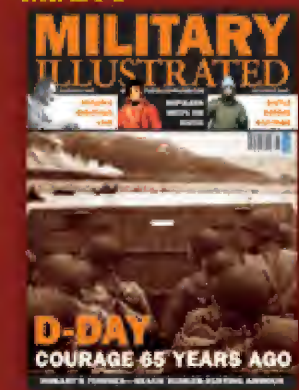
Skorzeny's Surprise, WWII; Napoleon fights for Paris; Mussolini against the Black Napoleon; Ordeal at Beecher Island, Frontier

Warfare; Henry the Warlord, Tudor Army.

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### MI/253



Hobart's Funnies; No Better Place to Die, WWII, Napoleon meets his match in Malta; Hitler's Mountain Lair, WWII; The Battle before Hastings.

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Reich; The Real Dracula Warlord; Custer on the Washita

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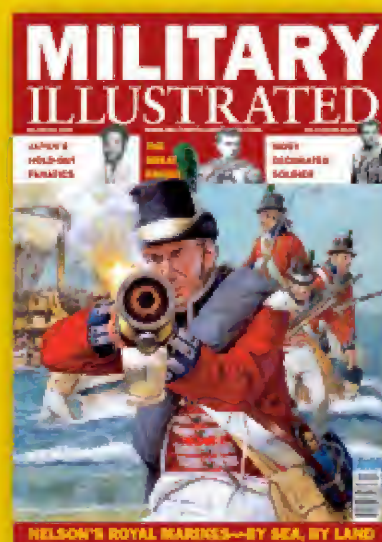
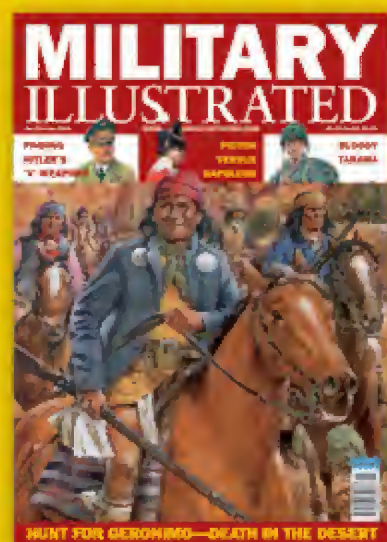
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# Re-enactors

## End of Empire

It is the 1600th anniversary of the end of the Roman Empire in Britain and it makes for dramatic recreations, says PHILIPP ELLIOT-WRIGHT.



**O**ne thousand six hundred years ago, it is recorded that a plea was dispatched from the Britons to the Roman Emperor Honorius requesting military assistance. Honorius replied that the island must look to its own defences. Consequently, the year 410 has traditionally been marked as the abandonment of Rome of its province of Britannia, ending 360 years of Roman rule. This fascinating period, ushering in the period colloquially known as the Dark Ages, has attracted various re-enactment groups, especially as the 5th century is the legendary Age of Arthur. Indeed, the most recent King Arthur film starred the actor Clive Owen as a Romano-British knight choosing to remain as the last Roman garrison departed.

### Mail armour

The reality is that, unlike 1066, the end of Roman civilisation in Britain was far from sudden; indeed, it is debatable whether the last Imperial soldiers in 410 were Roman at all. By 410, many Roman troops were a mix of local recruits and foreign auxiliaries. Today, those re-enacting the era do not fall into the simple before and after 410 characterisation, rather they portray a complex story, where Rome gradually

departed and the remaining Romano-Britons fought desperately to defend the civilisation they inherited.

The group Britannia provides arguably the most substantive recreation of the late Roman army, offering a span of impressions that cover both the 4th and 5th century, either side of Rome's withdrawal. The late Imperial and Romano-British impression is far from the familiar 1st century Roman legionary equipped with lorica segmentata plate armour, imperial Gallic helmets and short thrusting gladius swords. By 400 AD, soldiers wore long sleeved and knee length linen or woollen tunics enlivened with coloured decoration. Armour was ring, scale or lamellar mail, with Persian style spangenhelms. Shields were round and swords were long slashing spathas.

### Roman knights

Another leading group recreating the last years of the Roman army in Britain is Comitatus, offering both mounted and infantry impressions. Central to their late Roman impression is armoured cavalry, known as the Taifali, who were critical to the mobile formations striving to defend the far-flung Roman frontiers. Forerunners of the later armoured knights, it is highly likely that the Romano-British forces

of the time of Arthur were similar in terms of arms and armour, already wearing long coats of mail and utilising the lance to attack infantry.

Recreating both military and civilian life from the 4th to 6th century there is The Batavi, portraying a late Roman army unit, the Batavi iuniores Britannici, a typical formation of the Roman mobile field army. As with similar formations, there is evidence this formation may well have chosen to remain in Britain into the 5th century.

British re-enactors are not alone in recreating the end of Imperial Rome. The collapse of direct Roman rule came during the 5th century across Western Europe. In Holland, the group Fectio portray a unit known as the Fectienses Seniores who were the last garrison of the Roman defences on the Lower Rhine known as the Limes. In a similar manner to their Romano-British compatriots, many such formations remained to serve the subsequent local regime •

**For further details on Britannia –**  
[www.durolitum.co.uk](http://www.durolitum.co.uk)

**For Comitatus –** [www.comitatus.net](http://www.comitatus.net)

**For The Batavi –** <http://batavi.sowebbs.com>

**For Fectio –** [www.fectio.org.uk/fectio](http://www.fectio.org.uk/fectio)





## KRIEGSMARINE KILLER

Marcus Nicholls takes a look in the box of Dragon's new 1:350 Scharnhorst battle-cruiser



**D**ragon have been making model kits of ships for years but they have been gradually upping the ante in terms of detail and with their newest kit, they have made quite a splash, literally. It depicts the WW2 German battle-cruiser Scharnhorst as she appeared in 1943, just prior to her sinking and as such she is at her most colourful, if a warship could be described as colourful; the full disruptive camouflage makes quite an impact at this scale and the concave, 'Atlantic' bow is well depicted. The only 'negative' thing about this late re-fit (from a modelling point of view) is the lack of Arado Ar196 spotter aircraft – these were deleted from the ship in its final incarnation. Scharnhorst sank at 7:45pm on December 26th 1943 with her engines still running. Of the 1,968 crew, only thirty-six survived.

The hull comes in two halves, split longitudinally at the waterline, although if you want to build the model in waterline form it'll need to be set in a flat-calm seascape because the freeboard is minimal and even the slightest bow wave will result

in portions of the lower hull being exposed. The remainder of the huge kit box is filled with sprues carrying the decks, superstructure, gun turrets, fixtures and fittings; and there's a lot of them!

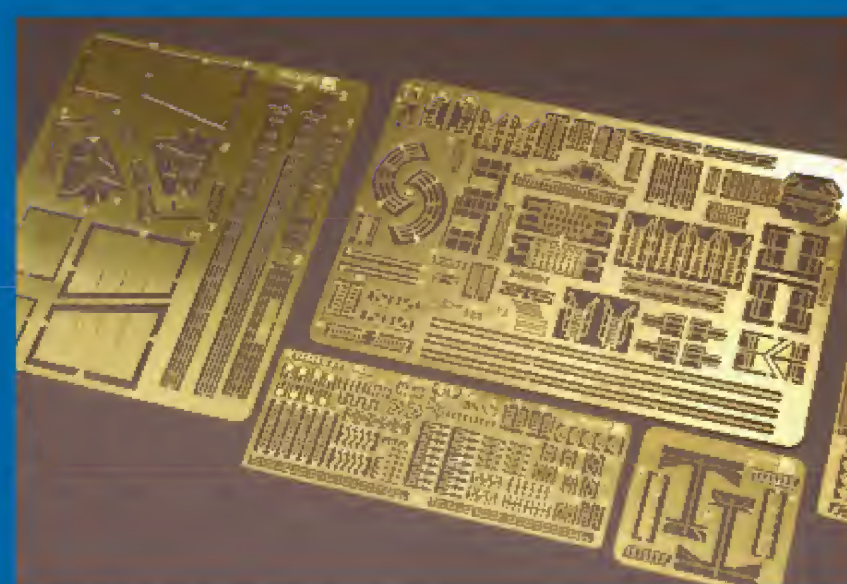
Even though this is labelled as a 'Smart Kit' (which means a reduced amount of photo-etched parts for an easier build) it still comes with four brass frets, although admittedly of modest proportions. On them you'll find ladders, antenna arrays, some structural elements, anchor chains and more, but no railings; these can be obtained from White Ensign Models though.

From a look in the box, Dragon have created a very highly detailed, refined kit of this famous Kriegsmarine battle-cruiser. All indications point to a 'highly recommended' rating •

**DRAGON 1:350 GERMAN BATTLESHIP SCHARNHORST KIT NO.1040**

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# Militaria

## Rare Items

**T**he new sale season started with one of Bosleys best in September with over 1000 lots. As usual, the range of prices realised was considerable, going from £25 to £42,000. The sale was accompanied by a very good catalogue that, as always, was well researched, clearly written and fully illustrated. These rooms are generous in their approach to those offering lots for they make no charge to the vendor for the illustrations and the annual charge for four catalogues per annum of £88 may seem high but the reference value of the publications more than compensates the cost.



**SOE tyre-slashing knife, £1900.**  
(Bosleys)

The sale opened with a large section devoted to badges of various types and some high prices were realised. A good example of a Bell Top shako plate of 19th century, as worn by an officer of the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment of Foot, sold for £1,400, followed closely by another of the same regiment which made £1,100. Whilst such prices may be well beyond the pocket of many collectors, there were plenty of other lots selling for less than £100, such as a Volunteer Engineer's helmet plate at £40.

### Shooting medals

The highly decorative plates worn on Lancers' caps are particularly attractive and one from the 16th Queen's Lancers, dating from the early 20th century, sold for £420, which does not seem excessive considering the elaborate form. Another very decorative but largely useless piece of equipment carried by cavalry officers was the sabretache. A very rare example with belt, as worn by an officer of the Georgian Yorkshire Yeomanry, reached £1,500, before the hammer came down.

For the collector looking for a field that still offers relatively inexpensive and not too uncommon items, then shooting medals are worth considering. There was

a batch of four in this sale, each selling at £40. They dated from the late 19th century and were all prize badges from shoots held by the National Rifle Association at Wimbledon. As there were so many Victorian Volunteer units and shooting clubs holding competitions, there are plenty of shooting prizes, including shields, mugs, spoons and medals on the market. Even less expensive was a Lancashire Fusilier's post 1881, other ranks fur cap grenade and that went for £30.

There were around 20 lots of medals and as is common these days all fetched quite good prices with a top figure of £42,000 being paid for a Conspicuous Gallantry group to a Private of 2nd Battalion Mercian Regiment, awarded for his action in Afghanistan. The estimate was £20,000 to £30,000. The medal was accompanied by various documents praising his courage. An earlier campaign in India and Afghanistan was remembered by a group of three to an officer of 20th Light Dragoons, dating from Cabul and Sutlej early in 19th century. These sold for £8,500. A group of medals to casualties from Bomber Command from the same family sold for £2,400. Lowest price for any medal was £60 and there were a number at this price, including those from South Africa.

### Corps of Gentlemen

A number of painted truncheons were included in the Curios section and it is noticeable that more of these have been turning up on the market recently and most sell for prices between £100 and £300 each. The condition and decoration, especially if it includes a name or location, will affect the price. Among those on offer the most expensive was a wand of office as carried

**Full dress sporran of Gordon Highlanders, £460.** (Bosleys)



**Persian helmet or Kula Khud, made in the form of a devil, £450** (Bosleys)

by a Governor of the Bedlam Hospital, the 18th century madhouse whose building now houses the Imperial War Museum. These officers' staves are uncommon and such a special example was bound to attract some good bids, although a similar one from Christ's Hospital, City of London, failed to sell. The more usual truncheons all sold between £150 and £300 each.

British Army headdress always attracts good bids and a one example of the shako of 1857-61 worn by an officer of the 14th (The King's) Light Dragoons, complete with bullion lines and horsehair plume, sold for £2,200. At £50 there was a Royal Marine's white pith helmet. Surprisingly a very rare, decorative helmet of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms failed to reach its low estimate of £4,000. The uniform section offered some rather unusual items such as a pair of Scottish 1914 spats at £30.

There was an unusually large section of German material including badges, daggers and bits of uniform. As Bosleys guarantee the authenticity of such items, their prices realised are generally quite high. Daggers made the biggest prices with an Air Raid Precautions Dagger topping the list at £1,700, closely followed by a 1933 SS Solingen dagger, complete with its hanger that sold at £1,500. A little surprising was the failure of an SS Honour dagger to reach its low estimate of £2,000.

The final section comprised edged weapons and offered some quite unusual pieces, including several of SOE's strange items, such as a tyre-slashing knife. It may have looked rather like a Boy Scout's large folding pocket-knife, but its rarity pushed the price up to £1,900. Another piece from the SOE arsenal was a pencil dagger and this sold for £200. Topping them all was the favourite Fairbairn Sykes Commando dagger and, as this was a rare 1st pattern, it sold for twice the estimate and reached £1,600 before the hammer came down. Interestingly, it had seen service throughout World War Two •

*Frederick Wilkinson*



# Museums & Shows

## The Tigers

JOHN NORRIS visits a regimental museum in Leicester

**C**omputer technology has been readily incorporated by many regimental museums to allow visitors to view interactive displays and even search through files to find ancestors who served in a regiment. One museum with such a facility is the Royal Leicestershire Regiment Museum Collection at the Newarke Houses Museum, The Newarke, Leicester, LE2 7BY where visitors can use a screen to look for relatives who served in the ranks and the date of their service.

### Intense history

The story of this fine regiment is told from the time of its origins when raised as Richards' Regiment in 1688, using displays of badges, uniforms, medals, photographs and regimental trophies as exhibits to explain the history. The regiment gained distinction when it provided the guard at Windsor Castle during the last days of the reign of King

James II in the year it was raised. Several years later the regiment was engaged in fighting in France where it gained its first battle honour for the part it played in capturing the fortress of Namur in 1695.



After that campaign the regiment gained many more battle honours and the nickname The Tigers, from its cap badge of the Royal Tiger, which it was awarded in 1823. At that time it was known as the 17th Regiment of Foot and further hard campaigning followed, including service in the Crimean War where the first VC was awarded, before it was given the title Leicester Regiment in 1881.

Other campaigns where the regiment served include South Africa and the First World War, which saw the regiment gain a further three VCs. During the Second World War, the regiment expanded and battalions served in all theatres of fighting including the Far East where they served with the Chindits. This intense history is told in the displays along with its post-war service which included the 1st Battalion fighting in the Korean War. The Leicestershire Regiment was much reduced in size during this period, but still managed to add to its history by the 1st Battalion being the last to serve in Sudan before the country gained its independence in 1956.

The museum has full disabled access and the shop stocks a range of related titles. It is open every day of the week except the Christmas period but for hours of opening it is best to telephone in advance on 0116 225 4980 or visit [www.leicester.gov.uk/museums](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/museums)

## December UK Diary

### ■ 2: Thursday

Lunchtime lecture at the National Army Museum at Chelsea in London with guest speaker Ian Stafford presenting a talk entitled 'Canadian Border Raiding 1815-1870' Presentation begins at 12.30pm with free entry. Further details telephone 020 7730 0717 or visit [www.national-army-museum.ac.uk](http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)

### ■ 4: Saturday

The Toy Soldier Show is being held at the Royal National Hotel, Bedford Way, London WC1H 0DG. This is supported by King & Country Models. Further details telephone 01388 818882 or visit [www.thetoyshow.com](http://www.thetoyshow.com)

### ■ 5: Sunday

Northern Militaria Expo is a new event being held at the Newark County Showground, NG24 2NY with military vehicles, books, models and other collectables. Further details visit [www.northernmilitaryexpo.co.uk](http://www.northernmilitaryexpo.co.uk)

The Chelmsford Militaria Fair is being held at the Marconi Social Club at Beehive Lane, Chelmsford, Essex. Further details telephone 07595 511981.

The Bromsgrove Militaria Fair has moved its

location to a new venue which is now The Council House, Spadesbourne Suite, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove, Worcs. B60 1AA. Doors open between 9.30am and 2pm with £2.50 entrance. Further details telephone 01926 886510.

The Brecon Militaria Collectors Swap Shop and Fair is returning to the Brecon Town Indoor Market Hall in Wales. Wide range of collectables including books and models on offer. Doors open between 10am and 2pm with £1 entrance charge. Further details telephone either 01639 722479 or 01874 658342.

### ■ 9: Thursday

Lunchtime lecture at the National Army Museum at Chelsea in London with guest speaker Carole Divall presenting a talk entitled 'Egyptian Expedition 1801' Presentation begins at 12.30pm with free entry. Further details telephone 020 7730 0717 or visit [www.national-army-museum.ac.uk](http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk)

### ■ 10 & 11: Friday and Saturday

The Aviation & Military Book Centre, Friendship Models and S.B.Models have organised a Traders' Fayre for modellers at the Conference Room, Premier Inn, Starlaw Road, Bathgate,

EH48 1LQ. Time of opening for Friday is 4pm to 9pm and Saturday opening time is 9am to 5pm. Books, models and other accessories will be on offer. Further details telephone 0845 260 4413.

### ■ 12: Sunday

Arms, Medal and Militaria Fair is being held at the Pudsey Civic Hall near Pudsey Railway Station LS28 5TA. Doors open between 10am to 3pm. Books, models and photographs along with other collectables. Further details telephone 01423 780759 or visit [www.northernarmsfairs.co.uk](http://www.northernarmsfairs.co.uk)

Militaria Fair at The Maltings, off Bridge Square, Farnham, Surrey GU9 7QR with doors open between 10am and 2pm. Further details telephone 01892 730233 or visit [www.militaria-fairs.com](http://www.militaria-fairs.com)

All modelling societies, war gaming clubs, re-enactment units and museums are invited to send news and details of their special events to:

John Norris, 1 Porters Hatch Close, Meare, Glastonbury, Somerset, BA6 9SB.

They can also be E-mailed to:

[john.norris3@btinternet.com](mailto:john.norris3@btinternet.com) where they will be included in this monthly list.



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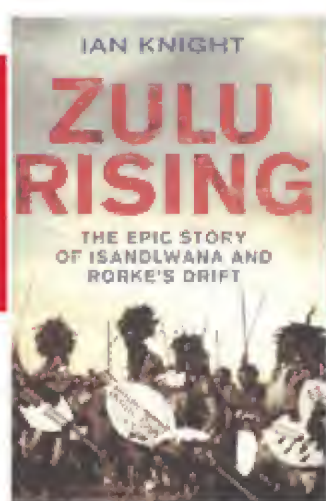


# Book Reviews

## Zulu Rising – The Epic Story of iSandlwana and Rorke's Drift

by Ian Knight  
(Sidgwick &  
Jackson/Macmillan)

698pp, hardback, £20.00

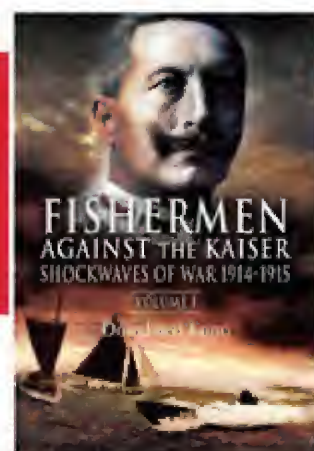


brought together first-hand accounts of the Waterloo campaign from the Hanoverian and King's German Legion troops who were there. The first volume contains many previously unpublished documents written by officers and soldiers serving under the command of the Duke of Wellington, many translated for the first time. It includes eye-witness accounts of their valiant defence of La Haie Sainte and Hougomont during the battle. The text is enhanced by 10 superb new illustrations by Gerry Embleton of action during the battle, plus some excellent maps. All in all, an essential book for the Waterloo historian.

Tim Newark

## Fishermen against the Kaiser: shockwaves of war 1914-15

by Douglas d'Enno  
(Pen & Sword) 231pp,  
hardback, £19.99



This seldom-examined aspect of WWI is detailed and well researched, with good use of private papers, diaries, official reports and publications, which are used to explore the role of trawlers, drifters and fishing smacks, together with their crews in combating mines, submarines and other naval threats in British coastal regions. The training of the crews, equipping and arming the vessels is clearly described but somewhat short on technical detail. The problems of integrating crews with Royal Naval Reservists used to naval discipline is effectively outlined; as are the problems of recruitment and retention, all making for a challenging leadership proposition for the ships' captains.

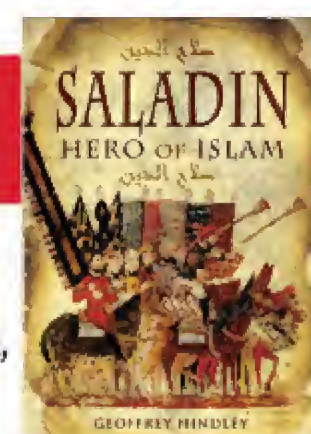
Awarding prize money - £1,000 for a captured or sunk submarine - encouraged aggressive seamanship and motivated these motley crews. Other areas of operations included the Dardanelles (in support of the Gallipoli landings) and the Adriatic, where the trawlers had transport and evacuation duties alongside minesweeping and counter-submarine warfare. Tasks ranged from Zeppelin-spotting, as these huge dirigibles raided

coastal towns, to protecting the main supply artery to France and providing a lifeboat rescue service. Captured trawlers were very badly-treated by their captors, which only emphasises their bravery. This book will appeal both to WWI buffs and maritime specialists alike.

John Allen

## Saladin: Hero of Islam

by Geoffrey Hindley  
(Pen & Sword) 208pp,  
paperback, £12.99



If asked to name a Muslim military hero I suggest that the readers of this magazine would usually plump for Saladin. Even at the time when he was the Crusaders' feared and implacable enemy, he was celebrated in Western histories and literature as a man of high morality and great skill. Bizarrely, he even appeared in one popular Old French text—The Ordering of Chivalry as the noble individual best suited to instruct a Christian knight in proper behaviour! He is best known for opposing the Third Crusade and Richard the Lionheart's attempt to recapture Jerusalem in 1191/92; but he actually spent more of his life fighting Muslims.

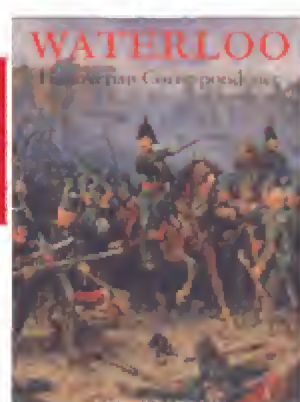
It was his ability to create an empire stretching from Egypt to Iran (he was a Kurd), which enabled him to conquer the Kingdom of Jerusalem after his great victory at Hattin in 1187, and hold it against all comers. The author provides a lively and readable account, not bogged down with footnotes, but fully revised from its original 1976 text and of a high scholarly standard. This book will serve both the general reader and a student of Crusader Studies (which many universities now provide) equally well. My only disagreement is with his interpretation of Richard's execution of the garrison of Acre after its fall, due to Saladin's procrastination in negotiation. He should have ransomed them, and lost the battle of Arsuf as a result, because his soldiers had lost faith in him; but then, he won the war.

Matthew Bennett

## Waterloo: Hanoverian Correspondence

by John Franklin  
(1815 Limited)

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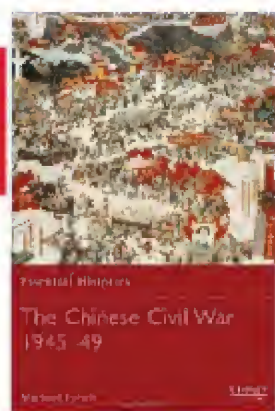
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# Book Reviews

## The Chinese Civil War 1945-49

by Michael Lynch  
(Osprey Essential  
Histories) 96pp,  
paperback, £10.99



As the largest country with the biggest population it was perhaps inevitable that China would suffer more from WW2 than any other state. In fact, its tragedies began earlier, with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and what developed into a genocidal conflict and a long drawn out fight for independence with the help of the Allies, up to 1945. But the defeat of Japan did not resolve the political situation in China where the Western-backed Nationalists (Guomindang to GMD) and Communists (CPP) fought for supremacy. This resulted in another six million deaths to add to the horrendous casualties of WW2, including one million landlords executed on the grounds that they were an oppressive class.

For a long time it looked as if the GMD would triumph, and Mao Zedong's forces were hopelessly outgunned; but Mao managed to win the propaganda war and also, through a mixture of ideological encouragement and straightforward brutality to carry the mass of the people in his direction. His thoughts on the importance of guerrilla warfare are well known today, stressing the close relationship that must exist between the soldier and the peasant in creating a solidarity that can make a state function. This volume is well-organised and beautifully illustrated, especially with maps of the wide-ranging and complex operations, as is usual in an Osprey publication. The text is clear and thoughtful, making the book a valuable introduction to the topic.

Matthew Bennett

## Mayhem In The Med—A Chronicle Of The Cyprus Emergency 1955-1960

by Richard G M Stiles (Savannah  
Publications) 392pp, softback, £14.99

The Cyprus Emergency of 1955-1960 is Britain's forgotten war,

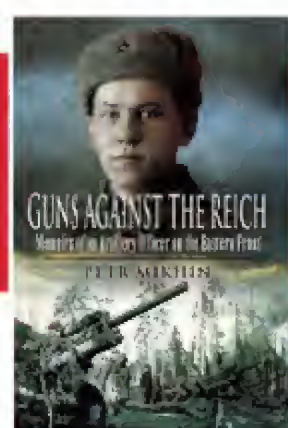
where over 100,000 British soldiers served and over 400 were killed. Sadly, the media seems to have ignored the 50th anniversary in August this year of the end of this significant event and the establishment of the state of Cyprus. This book goes some way to correcting that with an impressive collection of material on the soldiers who took part and a day-by-day account of the conflict. Generously, it honours these servicemen and will help today's with £1 from every copy sold going to the HELP FOR HEROES charity.

Peter Marriot

## Guns Against the Reich: Memoirs of an Artillery Officer on the Eastern Front

by Petr Mikhin (Pen  
& Sword, 2010)

214pp, hardback, £19.99



This powerful autobiography from a Russian veteran of Stalingrad, Kursk and numerous other battles is a lively account of his experiences in the 1028th Artillery Regiment (even the title tells the reader something about the scale of the conflict) as he fought his way from Moscow to Vienna. Great credit must go both to the translator from the Russian and the creator of the English text, as the story really rattles along, and it is possible to get a real feel for the narrator and his comrades. On the defence he lived a dugout life similar to that of WWI, on the offensive there are plenty of indications of high morale and the cheeky, if often black humour, of the military life.

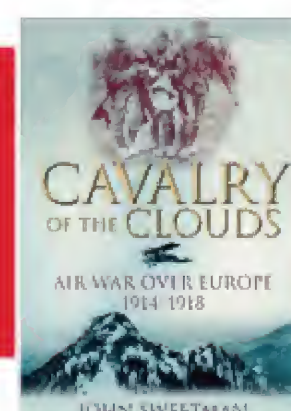
There is a section of black-and-white photographs showing the main protagonists and some of the weaponry used (although the picture entitled 'Repairing the recuperator mechanism of a 122mm M-30 howitzer' is only for spotters!). I could have done with some maps, not least because I cannot call to mind the geography of vast swathes of Russia and Eastern Europe immediately, although a reader could find them elsewhere, I accept. Overall, this is very nice production and testimony to a very brave man. He was a teacher before the war, the profession he returned to afterwards, he was wounded three times and suffered from shell-shock; his humanity springs out the pages as he did his duty for his country.

Matthew Bennett

## Cavalry of the Clouds: Air War over Europe 1914-1918

by John Sweetman  
(The History Press)

224pp, hardback, £20.00



On the first page of this book the author debunks any idea that somehow the air war, fought for the first time in 1914-18, was a glorious and chivalric enterprise. Rather, the first combat pilots had to deal with flimsy, ill-designed aircraft: 'machines... like bird cages, so many wires, with a bunch of squib firecrackers inside them', according to one Canadian RFC flyer. The De Havilland 2, a single-seat, pusher biplane, was known as the 'spinning incinerator' by cynical airmen. But this book does not confine itself to the British experience, and there is balancing information from the German point of view. For example, the great pilot Max Immelmann features prominently, although readers may be surprised to learn that the looping turn named after him was actually invented by a Brit.

The great value of this study is that, together with much fascinating detail about the men and their machines, it also provides wide-ranging insights into the progress of the fighting over four years; it is literally a view of the Great War from the air. This analytical approach sets Sweetman's work apart from more pedestrian studies and results in an enthralling read. The volume is also well-illustrated by maps and over 60 excellent photographs, largely from the Imperial War Museum collection, recording the people, a range of planes and their equipment, and the events of the air war. Perhaps the most poignant is the grave of a German pilot marked with the remains of a propeller, as was apparently their common practice.

Matthew Bennett

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The M3 Medium Tank was designed as an answer to European battlefield conditions at the start of WWII. The solution was the M3's unconventional design, which features a 75mm main gun mounted in a sponson on the right, front of the hull. The British dubbed it 'General Grant' and named the US Army version 'General Lee.' This book takes a detailed look at the M3 Tank with more than 200 photographs, color profiles and detailed line drawings. 80 pages.

### SS7005 - Great Battles of the World: Berlin 1945



By the dawn of 1945, the Western Allies had driven back Hitler's last, desperate effort in the Ardennes. However, the Allies' insistence on Germany's unconditional surrender deterred the Germans from making any concession over ending the war - Hitler and the Nazi faithful saw their only option to be a fanatical Wagnerian stand leaving only Germany's ruins to commemorate the tragedy. Further, it was already clear that another kind of war was right around the corner. The Soviets had already reached Budapest and the Oder River; it was obvious who would dominate Eastern Europe. The only hope for America and Britain to retain what they could of Central Europe was to take Berlin, but the 'Russian steamroller' forestalled them. Massive Soviet forces attacked the city

in April 1945 - the last act of the confrontation between the Communists and the National Socialists and the first act of the Cold War. Illustrated with color and b/w photographs, color maps, 8 aircraft and 9 armor profiles, and 14 color uniform plates; Stavropoulos, Vourliotis, Terniotis, Kotoulas, Valmas, and Zouridis. Great Battles of the World; 128 pages.

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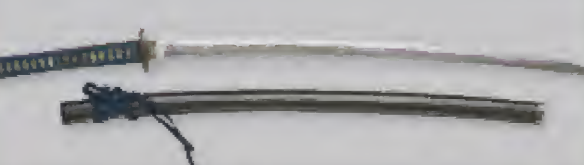
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